



# City of Seattle

Edward B. Murray, Mayor

## Seattle Office for Civil Rights

Patricia Lally, Director

**Date:** May 20, 2016  
**To:** Public Safety, Civil Rights and Technology Committee Members  
**From:** Loren Othon, Seattle Office for Civil Rights; David Mendoza, Mayor's Office  
**Subject:** **Alternative Source of Income Discrimination**

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On May 24, 2016, the Public Safety, Civil Rights and Technology Committee will have its first briefing and discussion on the Alternative Source of Income Discrimination Legislation. The legislation proposes amendments to the Seattle Municipal Code, including:

- Fair housing protections expanded beyond Section 8 voucher holders to include other subsidies and verifiable sources of income such as Social Security, veteran's benefits and child support payments.
- Rules for how to calculate subsidies and alternative sources of income when rent to income ratios are used in tenant screening.

### Background

For over 25 years, the City of Seattle has protected a person's right to housing using a Section 8 housing voucher (SMC 14.08). Seattle's ordinance was unanimously passed in 1989 in response to the housing affordability crisis. At that time, between 3,000-5,000 people a night were experiencing homelessness, and thousands more faced rental restrictions due to their use of HUD programs that helped offset their rent payments. Many of them were elderly, disabled or low income people of color.

In the last eight years, the Seattle Office for Civil Rights has investigated 67 cases involving Section 8 discrimination. Over half of the charging parties have been women, and in some cases additional discriminatory bases included race, disability, family status, sexual orientation and age. We have seen a variety of cases, including advertisements that explicitly state "No Section 8" (which can have a chilling effect on a person seeking housing); applicants told that units are only available to young professionals; and applicants told that units are only rented to tenants making three times the rent. We also know that due to existing racial inequities, people of color are overrepresented as Section 8 voucher holders in Seattle. African Americans, Native Americans and Asian Pacific Islanders are doubly represented as vouchers holders compared to their total proportion of the Seattle population. This means that discrimination on the basis of Section 8 has a disproportionate impact on these communities of color.



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At the same time, individuals and families are also being denied housing based on their use of other subsidies such as child support payments, Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, unemployment insurance, or veteran's benefits. These restrictions impact many of the same communities that depend on Section 8 vouchers: parents, veterans, people with disabilities, seniors, low income people of color and others.

Seattle's Open Housing Ordinance (SMC 14.08) provides a legislative framework to expand current Section 8 protection to include additional subsidies and other sources of income a person may use to pay their rent, such as child support payments.

This legislation is a recommendation of the Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA) Committee and a part of the Mayor's Action Plan to Address Seattle's Affordability Crisis. A stakeholder committee comprised of tenant advocates, landlords, social service agencies and nonprofit housing providers provided input on the development of the legislation.

### **Next Steps**

If you have any questions about the Alternative Source of Income Discrimination legislation, please contact Loren Othon ([loren.othon@seattle.gov](mailto:loren.othon@seattle.gov) / 206.684.4528) or David Mendoza ([david.mendoza@seattle.gov](mailto:david.mendoza@seattle.gov) / 206-386- 1256).