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TO: Housing Providers

FROM: Andrew J. Bruck, Acting Attorney General, State of New Jersey
Rosemary DiSavino, Deputy Director, NJ Division on Civil Rights

DATE: January 2022

SUBJECT: Fair Chance in Housing Act

The purpose of this letter is to help you comply with the newly enacted Fair Chance in Housing Act (FCHA), N.J.S.A. 46:8-52 to -64 (effective January 1, 2022).

Fair Chance in Housing Act:

The FCHA prohibits housing providers from asking about rental applicants' criminal records on an initial application or otherwise considering an applicant's criminal record in any way, until after they've made a conditional housing offer to the applicant, with limited exceptions as required under federal law. The goal of the FCHA is to ensure that formerly incarcerated and system-involved people have fair access to housing around the state.

Nothing about the FCHA requires landlords or housing providers to consider a person's criminal record in housing. If a housing provider does review an applicant's criminal history after a conditional offer, specific restrictions apply. A housing provider must conduct an individualized analysis of an applicant's criminal record and may only deny housing if withdrawing a conditional offer is necessary to fulfill a substantial, legitimate, and nondiscriminatory interest.

Here are some of the specific requirements for housing providers under the FCHA:

- Housing providers are prohibited from asking about applicants' criminal records until after they've made a conditional housing offer, except for convictions of drug-related criminal activity for the manufacture or production of methamphetamine on the premises of federally assisted housing, or if the applicant is subject to a lifetime registration in a state sex offender registry.



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- Even after a conditional offer, a housing provider may not consider arrests or charges that did not result in a criminal conviction, expunged convictions, convictions erased through executive pardon, vacated and otherwise legally nullified convictions, juvenile adjudications of delinquency, and sealed records.
- If a housing provider chooses to consider an applicant's criminal history after a conditional offer, they may only consider:
 - Convictions for murder, aggravated sexual assault, kidnapping, arson, human trafficking, sexual assault, endangering the welfare of a child in violation of N.J.S.2C:24-4(b)(3);
 - Convictions for any crime that requires lifetime state sex offender registration;
 - Any 1st degree indictable offense, or release from prison for that offense, within the past 6 years;
 - Any 2nd or 3rd degree indictable offense, or release from prison for that offense, within the past 4 years; or
 - Any 4th degree indictable offense, or release from prison for that offense, within the past 1 year.
- For a conviction that can be considered, a housing provider must conduct an individualized analysis that includes:
 - Nature and severity of the offense(s)
 - Applicant's age at the time of the offense(s);
 - How recently the offense(s) occurred;
 - Any information the applicant provided in their favor since the offense(s);
 - If the offense(s) happened again in the future, whether that would impact the safety of other tenants or property; and
 - Whether the offense(s) happened on, or was connected to, property that the applicant had rented or leased
- If the housing provider intends to consider criminal history as provided for under the FCHA after a conditional offer, they cannot accept an application fee before disclosing that fact to the applicant, and offering the applicant an opportunity to provide evidence of inaccuracies in their criminal record, other evidence of rehabilitation, or mitigating factors. This requirement can be fulfilled using the Model Disclosure Statement on DCR's website, found at https://www.njoag.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Model-Disclosure-Statement_12.14.21.pdf.
- If the housing provider withdraws a conditional offer based on criminal record, they must explain in writing their justification for doing so, which can be fulfilled using the Model Notice of Withdrawal on DCR's website, found at https://www.njoag.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Model-Notice-of-Withdrawal_12.15.21.pdf. An applicant can then request the information the housing provider relied upon, and can submit mitigating information or inaccuracies related to aspects of their criminal record which may be considered under the FCHA, which the housing provider must then consider.

- If the housing provider utilizes any vendor or outside person or entity to conduct a criminal record check on their behalf, they shall take reasonable steps to ensure that the vendor or outside person or entity is conducting the criminal record check consistent with the requirements of the FCHA. The housing provider will be liable under the FCHA for relying on a criminal history inquiry conducted by a vendor or outside person or entity that is conducted in violation of the FCHA if it failed to take reasonable steps to ensure compliance.
- Housing providers are prohibited from discriminating against those with criminal records in any advertising, notices, or publications. They also cannot require applicants to submit to drug or alcohol testing, or to provide information from a treatment facility.

Penalties. If you violate the FCHA, you may be subject to penalties up to \$1,000 for a first violation within five years of the complaint, up to \$5,000 for a second violation within five years of the complaint, and up to \$10,000 for two or more violations within seven years.

Other remedies. DCR may also authorize other remedies depending on the circumstances.

For more information about the FCHA, or if you have other questions about discrimination in the sale or rental of real property, including how to report a complaint, please visit www.NJCivilRights.gov or call our Housing Hotline at (866) 405-3050. Thank you.



Andrew J. Bruck
Acting Attorney General



Rosemary DiSavino
Deputy Director, Division on Civil Rights