



Working for Justice Since 1967

Columbia Legal Services advocates for people who face injustice and poverty. We seek to achieve social and economic justice for all, using policy reform, litigation, and innovative partnerships to reveal and end actions that harm the communities we serve.

[columbialegal.org](http://columbialegal.org)

## Ban Source of Income Discrimination

*Because any income can pay the rent*

*Expanding fair housing protections for people using subsidies or various sources of income to pay for housing will protect the most vulnerable residents from discrimination when finding a place to live.*

### Proposed Legislation and Recent Fair Housing Violations

Mayor Ed Murray proposed legislation that will expand fair housing protections beyond Housing Choice Vouchers to also include other subsidies and sources of income to pay their rent. If enacted, the [legislation](#) will prohibit landlords from the taking adverse actions against a tenant or applicant solely because of the source of income used to pay rent.

Strong protections against housing discrimination are essential, especially in light of the City of Seattle's recent finding after random testing that 23 property owners violated fair housing laws.

**“These test results are not isolated incidents – they demonstrate patterns of behavior that have profound impact on people’s lives.”** – Patrica Lally, Director of the Seattle Office for Civil Rights

### Disparate Impact on Protected Classes

When landlords refuse to rent to prospective tenants solely on the basis of their source of income such as social security, disability, veteran benefits, child support, housing subsidies or TANF, it can have a discriminatory effect.

#### Types of Income

Social Security is a major source of income for many segments of society. In 2015, it represented about 39% of total income for the elderly persons, and nine out of ten individuals who were age 65 and older received social security benefits. In 2014, 19% of all adult beneficiaries receiving social security were veterans.

Under the OASDI (Social Security) program, 71% of recipients are age 65 or older and 19% receive disability benefits. In 2015, 21,904 people in Washington received cash assistance from the Aged, Blind, or Disabled (ABD) program through DSHS.

During fiscal year 2015, 4.21 million veterans received VA disability compensation and 0.29 million received VA pension. In Washington, there were 135,525<sup>i</sup> veterans who received VA compensation or pension. In King County, there were 18,564 veterans who received VA compensation or pension.

TANF is also a source of income relied upon by people in our community. In fiscal year 2013, 85.7% of adult TANF cash assistance recipients were women. “The majority of adult [TANF] recipients today, as in the past, are women—specifically, single mothers”. Moreover, when it comes to child support payments, in 2013, “almost 83% of custodial parents were mothers” and 52.3% of those mothers were awarded child support.

In 2013, the percentage of DSHS clients who also received public housing assistance other than Housing Choice Vouchers was [32%](#). In SFY 2015, of the [8,681](#) adults in Washington were referred to HEN, and 7,867 remained on HEN referral.

In December 2014, 151,262 Washingtonians received SSI and 28% also received OASDI. Approximately 25% of Washingtonians who received SSI lived in King County. Of those individuals, 78% were blind and disabled, 37% were 65 or older, and 24% also received OASDI benefits.

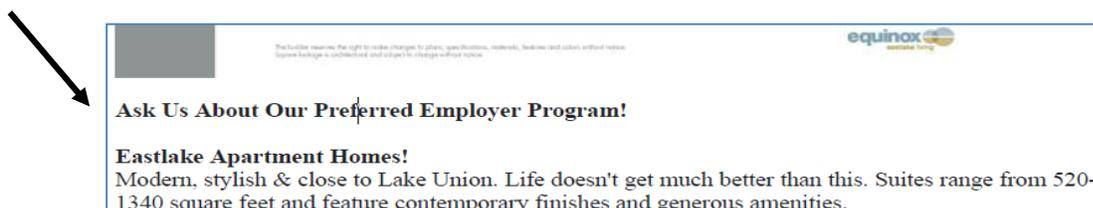
*Source: Social Security Administration*  
[https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/ssi\\_sc/2014/ssi\\_sc14.pdf](https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/ssi_sc/2014/ssi_sc14.pdf)

In December 2014, [1.572](#) million Washingtonians received OASDI benefits, and 90.7% of the total population aged 65 or older received benefits. 24% of those receiving these benefits lived in King County and approximately 12% of those living in King County received disability benefits.

*Source: Social Security Administration*  
[https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/oasdi\\_sc/2014/oasdi\\_sc14.pdf](https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/oasdi_sc/2014/oasdi_sc14.pdf)

### Preferred Employer Programs May Discriminate Against Women and People of Color

Preferred employer programs, where landlords offer discounts and fee waivers to some applicants and not to others based on what entity employs them, can have a disparate impact on certain protected classes. Advertisements for preferred employer programs are seen in Craigslist postings for rentals in Seattle and surrounding cities. It is typically aimed at individuals who work at Amazon, Starbucks Corporate, Boeing, Microsoft, and other large companies. In a community where housing is already scarce, this practice can make finding a home even harder for women and racial and ethnic minorities. **As of July 2015, women composed only [39%](#) of Amazon’s workforce. As of September 2015, women made up only [26.8%](#) of Microsoft’s workforce and African Americans comprised 3.5% of employees.**



*Source: Craigslist ad for Equinox Apartments in South Eastlake South Lake Union area*

### The Trend in Prohibiting Source of Income Discrimination

As of May 2016, [twelve](#) states and the District of Columbia have enacted statutes prohibiting landlords from discriminating against an individual based on their source of income. **Forty** localities and municipalities that have also passed similar ordinances. In [October 2015](#), Vancouver, WA amended its law to prohibit source of income discrimination in housing practices.

### Call for Action

1. Ensure that Seattle’s fair housing ordinance includes protections for all sources of income used.
2. Ban employer preferences and only allow them where there is no discriminatory effect from the policy.
3. Fund strong enforcement of this new law.

<sup>1</sup> Go to <http://www.va.gov/vetdata/stateSummaries.asp>. The total number was derived from going to the “[Compensation and Pension by County: 2015](#)” excel sheet, located in the box titled “What’s New” which is located under the map. I added the total number for all counties in WA.