



September 20, 2022

Re: Source of Income Laws

Honorable Mayor Buffaloe and Honorable Members of the City Council:

The City of Columbia Commission on Human Rights has been gathering information based on “source of income laws” and use of Housing Choice vouchers. Chapter 12, Section 1, of the City of Columbia Code of Ordinances, states that the City “prohibits discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodation based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, receipt of governmental assistance, alienage or citizenship status, status as a victim of sexual or domestic violence, or order of protection status.” (Underline included for clarity.)

The Commission interprets this passage as meaning people should not be excluded from housing because they receive government assistance in the form of Housing Choice vouchers. Housing Choice vouchers, which pay a portion of a tenant’s rent, are the primary mechanism for meeting the need for affordable housing in the United States. Significantly, the program operates in the private rental market, and relies for its success on the participation of private landlords.

The Commission is aware there are many Columbia citizens who have Housing Choice vouchers but are unable to use them because landlords are unwilling to accept them. This creates a gap in housing mobility, with around 100 citizens and families stuck in precarious and substandard housing, despite the fact that they have vouchers in-hand that will subsidize their rent.

A number of states and municipalities across the nation have clarified that “source of income” is a protected category in order to combat voucher-based discrimination. The Commission finds that under the Columbia Code, an elaboration on the meaning of “governmental assistance” to include “source of income” (which includes Housing Choice vouchers) could help rectify any misunderstanding and provide a path toward ending the practice of voucher-based discrimination in our community.

We request that City Council clarify and emphasize to the public that “source of income” is a protected category in the Code of Ordinances, Chapter 12. This could be achieved by adding material to Section 12-38, “Sale or rental of dwellings,” to clarify that people who use housing vouchers cannot be discriminated against because of their source of income or use of housing vouchers, given that is a protected category within “receipt of governmental assistance.”

Enforcement would follow the same path as other claims of discrimination as outlined in Chapter 12, Division 2. The Columbia Housing Authority, which administers the majority of housing vouchers in Columbia, is available to work with and educate property owners about avoiding this form of discrimination.



City of Columbia, Missouri

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Amanda Hinnant, Chair
City of Columbia Commission on Human Rights