

FAIR HOUSING TESTING: WHAT IS IT? **(from West Virginia Assistive Technology Newsletter)**

Sometimes testing is needed to find out if a person is being discriminated against under Fair Housing laws. Testing is when volunteers pose as renters or buyers of apartments or homes. A testing coordinator decides if discrimination is taking place based on race, familial status, disability or the other classes of people protected by fair housing laws.

Fair Housing testing has been done for the last two years in several West Virginia cities. Sometimes discrimination is easy to spot. For instance, seven properties owned by four different companies were tested. Every property had multiple violations of the Fair Housing Design and Construction requirements. This makes it hard for a person with a mobility impairment to live there.

Testing was also done to make sure reasonable accommodations were granted to people with hearing impairments. These tests showed a high percentage of discrimination.

But when testing was done for discrimination based on mental illness, the majority of tests showed no evidence of discrimination. While this may be good, it may not really reflect the housing issues of people with mental illness.

Testing for Fair Housing will continue in West Virginia. You can become a volunteer tester and receive a small stipend. Contact the WV Housing Advocate at 304-296-6091 for more information or visit the WV Fair Housing Action Network website at www.wvairhousing.org .