



State of Wisconsin
2023 - 2024 LEGISLATURE

LRB-4679/1
MIM:klm

2023 SENATE BILL 634

November 7, 2023 - Introduced by Senators SMITH, L. JOHNSON, SPREITZER, HESSELBEIN, AGARD, LARSON and TAYLOR, cosponsored by Representatives RATCLIFF, JOERS, DRAKE, STUBBS, CONLEY, SNODGRASS, CABRERA, EMERSON, SHELTON, SINICKI, BALDEH, CLANCY, MADISON, PALMERI, OHNSTAD, BILLINGS, MOORE OMOKUNDE, C. ANDERSON, J. ANDERSON, JACOBSON and VINING. Referred to Committee on Housing, Rural Issues and Forestry.

AUTHORS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

1 **AN ACT** *to amend* 66.1011 (1), 66.1201 (2m), 66.1213 (3), 66.1301 (2m), 66.1331
2 (2m), 66.1333 (3) (e) 2., 106.50 (1), 106.50 (6) (a) 1., 106.50 (6) (b), 106.50 (6) (d),
3 106.50 (6) (e) 1., 106.50 (6) (f) 5., 106.50 (6) (h), 106.50 (6) (i), 106.50 (6m) (a),
4 106.50 (6m) (d) and 106.50 (8) (a); and *to create* 106.50 (3) of the statutes;
5 **relating to:** discrimination in housing based on prior eviction and providing
6 a penalty.

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau

This bill provides that it is discrimination under the state open housing law for any person to do any of the following:

1. Inquire, whether orally or in writing, of a prospective tenant or any other individual about any eviction of a prospective tenant that occurred more than five years prior. The bill prohibits a person from asking a prospective tenant about prior evictions unless the person informs the prospective tenant that the prospective tenant does not need to disclose evictions more than five years old.

2. Refuse to rent housing to an individual, or otherwise treat an individual unequally in the terms, conditions, or privileges of rental of housing, because the individual was evicted from housing more than five years before the date of a rental application.

The open housing law is administered by the Department of Workforce Development, which receives, investigates, and evaluates complaints of violations

SENATE BILL 634

and may order relief in appropriate cases. Persons who allege a violation of the open housing law may also bring a civil action.

For further information see the state and local fiscal estimate, which will be printed as an appendix to this bill.

The people of the state of Wisconsin, represented in senate and assembly, do enact as follows:

1 **SECTION 1.** 66.1011 (1) of the statutes is amended to read:

2 66.1011 (1) DECLARATION OF POLICY. The right of all persons to have equal
3 opportunities for housing regardless of their sex, race, color, disability, as defined in
4 s. 106.50 (1m) (g), sexual orientation, as defined in s. 111.32 (13m), religion, national
5 origin, marital status, family status, as defined in s. 106.50 (1m) (k), status as a
6 victim of domestic abuse, sexual assault, or stalking, as defined in s. 106.50 (1m) (u),
7 lawful source of income, age, ~~or~~ ancestry, or having a record of evictions that occurred
8 more than 5 years prior is a matter both of statewide concern under ss. 101.132 and
9 106.50 and also of local interest under this section and s. 66.0125. The enactment
10 of ss. 101.132 and 106.50 by the legislature does not preempt the subject matter of
11 equal opportunities in housing from consideration by political subdivisions, and does
12 not exempt political subdivisions from their duty, nor deprive them of their right, to
13 enact ordinances that prohibit discrimination in any type of housing solely on the
14 basis of an individual being a member of a protected class.

15 **SECTION 2.** 66.1201 (2m) of the statutes is amended to read:

16 66.1201 (2m) DISCRIMINATION. Persons otherwise entitled to any right, benefit,
17 facility, or privilege under ss. 66.1201 to 66.1211 may not be denied the right, benefit,
18 facility, or privilege in any manner for any purpose ~~nor~~; may not be discriminated
19 against because of sex, race, color, creed, sexual orientation, status as a victim of
20 domestic abuse, sexual assault, or stalking, as defined in s. 106.50 (1m) (u), or

SENATE BILL 634

1 national origin; and may not be questioned about, or denied housing due to, evictions
2 that occurred more than 5 years prior.

3 **SECTION 3.** 66.1213 (3) of the statutes is amended to read:

4 66.1213 (3) DISCRIMINATION. Persons otherwise entitled to any right, benefit,
5 facility, or privilege under this section may not be denied the right, benefit, facility,
6 or privilege in any manner for any purpose ~~nor~~; may not be discriminated against
7 because of sex, race, color, creed, sexual orientation, status as a victim of domestic
8 abuse, sexual assault, or stalking, as defined in s. 106.50 (1m) (u), or national origin;
9 and may not be questioned about, or denied housing due to, evictions that occurred
10 more than 5 years prior.

11 **SECTION 4.** 66.1301 (2m) of the statutes is amended to read:

12 66.1301 (2m) DISCRIMINATION. Persons entitled to any right, benefit, facility,
13 or privilege under ss. 66.1301 to 66.1329 may not be denied the right, benefit, facility,
14 or privilege in any manner for any purpose ~~nor~~; may not be discriminated against
15 because of sex, race, color, creed, sexual orientation, status as a victim of domestic
16 abuse, sexual assault, or stalking, as defined in s. 106.50 (1m) (u), or national origin;
17 and may not be questioned about, or denied housing due to, evictions that occurred
18 more than 5 years prior.

19 **SECTION 5.** 66.1331 (2m) of the statutes is amended to read:

20 66.1331 (2m) DISCRIMINATION. Persons otherwise entitled to any right, benefit,
21 facility, or privilege under this section may not be denied the right, benefit, facility,
22 or privilege in any manner for any purpose ~~nor~~; may not be discriminated against
23 because of sex, race, color, creed, sexual orientation, status as a victim of domestic
24 abuse, sexual assault, or stalking, as defined in s. 106.50 (1m) (u), or national origin;

SENATE BILL 634**SECTION 5**

1 and may not be questioned about, or denied housing due to, evictions that occurred
2 more than 5 years prior.

3 **SECTION 6.** 66.1333 (3) (e) 2. of the statutes is amended to read:

4 66.1333 (3) (e) 2. Persons otherwise entitled to any right, benefit, facility, or
5 privilege under this section may not be denied the right, benefit, facility, or privilege
6 in any manner for any purpose ~~nor~~; may not be discriminated against because of sex,
7 race, color, creed, sexual orientation, status as a victim of domestic abuse, sexual
8 assault, or stalking, as defined in s. 106.50 (1m) (u), or national origin; and may not
9 be questioned about, or denied housing due to, evictions that occurred more than 5
10 years prior.

11 **SECTION 7.** 106.50 (1) of the statutes is amended to read:

12 106.50 (1) INTENT. It is the intent of this section to render unlawful
13 discrimination in housing. It is the declared policy of this state that all persons shall
14 have an equal opportunity for housing regardless of sex, race, color, sexual
15 orientation, disability, religion, national origin, marital status, family status, status
16 as a victim of domestic abuse, sexual assault, or stalking, lawful source of income,
17 age, or ancestry ~~and it~~. It is also the declared policy of this state that individuals
18 should not be denied rental housing based upon evictions that occurred more than
19 5 years prior. It is the duty of the political subdivisions to assist in the orderly
20 prevention or removal of all discrimination in housing through the powers granted
21 under ss. 66.0125 and 66.1011. The legislature hereby extends the state law
22 governing equal housing opportunities to cover single-family residences that are
23 owner-occupied. The legislature finds that the sale and rental of single-family
24 residences constitute a significant portion of the housing business in this state and
25 should be regulated. This section shall be considered an exercise of the police powers

SENATE BILL 634

1 of the state for the protection of the welfare, health, peace, dignity, and human rights
2 of the people of this state.

3 **SECTION 8.** 106.50 (3) of the statutes is created to read:

4 106.50 (3) DENIAL OF RENTAL HOUSING BASED ON EVICTION RECORD. It is unlawful
5 for any person to do any of the following:

6 (a) Inquire, whether orally or in writing, of a prospective tenant or any other
7 individual about any eviction of the prospective tenant that occurred more than 5
8 years prior. If an owner, lessor, owner's agent, or lessor's agent inquires of a
9 prospective tenant or any other individual about evictions of the prospective tenant,
10 it is unlawful for the owner, lessor, owner's agent, or lessor's agent to fail to inform
11 the prospective tenant or other individual that the prospective tenant or other
12 individual is not required to disclose an eviction that occurred more than 5 years
13 prior.

14 (b) Refuse to rent housing to an individual, or otherwise treat an individual
15 unequally in the terms, conditions, or privileges of rental of housing, because of an
16 eviction of the individual that occurred more than 5 years prior to the date of a rental
17 application.

18 **SECTION 9.** 106.50 (6) (a) 1. of the statutes is amended to read:

19 106.50 (6) (a) 1. The department may receive and investigate a complaint
20 charging a violation of sub. (2), (2m) ~~or~~, (2r), or (3) if the complaint is filed with the
21 department not later than one year after the alleged discrimination occurred or
22 terminated.

23 **SECTION 10.** 106.50 (6) (b) of the statutes is amended to read:

24 106.50 (6) (b) *Powers and duties of department.* The department of workforce
25 development and its duly authorized agents may hold hearings, subpoena witnesses,

SENATE BILL 634**SECTION 10**

1 take testimony and make investigations as provided in this subsection. The
2 department of workforce development may test and investigate for the purpose of
3 establishing violations of sub. (2), (2m) ~~or~~ (2r), or (3) and may make, sign and file
4 complaints alleging violations of sub. (2), (2m) ~~or~~ (2r), or (3). In addition, the
5 department of safety and professional services may make, sign and file complaints
6 alleging violations of sub. (2r) (c). The department of workforce development shall
7 employ examiners to hear and decide complaints of discrimination under this
8 section, and to assist in the administration of this section. The examiners may make
9 findings and issue orders under this subsection. The department of workforce
10 development shall develop and implement an investigation manual for use in
11 conducting investigations under par. (c).

12 **SECTION 11.** 106.50 (6) (d) of the statutes is amended to read:

13 106.50 (6) (d) *Temporary judicial relief.* At any time after a complaint is filed
14 alleging discrimination in violation of sub. (2), (2m), ~~or~~ (2r), or (3), the department
15 may request the attorney general to file a petition in the circuit court for the county
16 in which the act of discrimination allegedly occurred or for the county in which a
17 respondent resides or transacts business, seeking a temporary injunction or
18 restraining order against the respondent to prevent the respondent from performing
19 an act that would tend to render ineffectual an order that the department may enter
20 with respect to the complaint, pending final determination of proceedings under this
21 section. On receipt of the department's request, the attorney general shall promptly
22 file the petition.

23 **SECTION 12.** 106.50 (6) (e) 1. of the statutes is amended to read:

24 106.50 (6) (e) 1. Upon the filing of a complaint alleging discrimination in
25 violation of sub. (2), (2m) ~~or~~ (2r), or (3), the department may endeavor to eliminate

SENATE BILL 634

1 the discrimination by conference, conciliation and persuasion. The department shall
2 notify the parties that conciliation services are available.

3 **SECTION 13.** 106.50 (6) (f) 5. of the statutes is amended to read:

4 106.50 **(6)** (f) 5. If after the hearing the examiner finds by a fair preponderance
5 of the evidence that the respondent has violated sub. (2), (2m) ~~or~~, (2r), or (3), the
6 examiner shall make written findings and order the respondent to take actions that
7 will effectuate the purpose of sub. (2), (2m) ~~or~~, (2r), or (3), and may order other
8 penalties, damages and costs as provided in pars. (h) and (i). The department shall
9 serve a certified copy of the final findings and order on the aggrieved party, the
10 complainant and the respondent. The order shall have the same force as other orders
11 of the department and be enforced as provided in this subsection except that the
12 enforcement of the order is automatically stayed upon the filing of a petition for
13 review under par. (j).

14 **SECTION 14.** 106.50 (6) (h) of the statutes is amended to read:

15 106.50 **(6)** (h) *Damages and penalties.* 1. If the hearing examiner finds that
16 a respondent has engaged in or is about to engage in a discriminatory act prohibited
17 under sub. (2), (2m) ~~or~~, (2r), or (3), the hearing examiner shall promptly issue an
18 order for such relief as may be appropriate, which may include economic and
19 noneconomic damages suffered by the aggrieved person, regardless of whether he or
20 she intervened in the action, and injunctive or other equitable relief. The hearing
21 examiner may not order punitive damages.

22 2. In addition to any damages ordered under subd. 1., the hearing examiner
23 may assess a forfeiture against a respondent who is not a natural person in an
24 amount not exceeding \$10,000, unless the respondent who is not a natural person
25 has been adjudged to have committed any prior discriminatory act under sub. (2),

SENATE BILL 634**SECTION 14**

1 (2m) ~~or~~, (2r), or (3). If a respondent who is not a natural person has been adjudged
2 to have committed one other discriminatory act under sub. (2), (2m) ~~or~~, (2r), or (3)
3 during the preceding 5-year period, based on the offense date of the prior
4 discriminatory act, the hearing examiner may assess a forfeiture in an amount not
5 exceeding \$25,000. If a respondent who is not a natural person has been adjudged
6 to have committed 2 or more prior discriminatory acts under sub. (2), (2m) ~~or~~, (2r),
7 or (3) during the preceding 7-year period, based on the offense date of the prior
8 discriminatory act, the hearing examiner may assess a forfeiture in an amount not
9 exceeding \$50,000.

10 3. In addition to any damages ordered under subd. 1., the administrative law
11 judge may assess a forfeiture against a respondent who is a natural person in an
12 amount not exceeding \$10,000, unless the respondent who is a natural person has
13 been adjudged to have committed any prior discriminatory act under sub. (2), (2m)
14 ~~or~~, (2r), or (3). If a respondent who is a natural person has been adjudged to have
15 committed one other prior discriminatory act under sub. (2), (2m) ~~or~~, (2r), or (3) based
16 on an offense date that is before September 1, 1992, the administrative law judge
17 may assess a forfeiture in an amount not exceeding \$25,000. If a respondent who is
18 a natural person has been adjudged to have committed 2 or more prior
19 discriminatory acts under sub. (2), (2m) ~~or~~, (2r), or (3) based on an offense date that
20 is before September 1, 1992, the administrative law judge may assess a forfeiture in
21 an amount not exceeding \$50,000.

22 **SECTION 15.** 106.50 (6) (i) of the statutes is amended to read:

23 106.50 (6) (i) *Attorney fees and costs.* The hearing examiner may allow a
24 prevailing complainant, including the state, reasonable attorney fees and costs. The
25 state shall be liable for those fees and costs if the state is a respondent and is

SENATE BILL 634

1 determined to have committed a discriminatory act under sub. (2), (2m) ~~or~~, (2r), or
2 (3).

3 **SECTION 16.** 106.50 (6m) (a) of the statutes is amended to read:

4 106.50 **(6m)** (a) Any person alleging a violation of sub. (2), (2m), ~~or~~ (2r), or (3),
5 including the attorney general on behalf of an aggrieved person, may bring a civil
6 action for injunctive relief, for damages, including punitive damages, and, in the case
7 of a prevailing plaintiff, for court costs and reasonable attorney fees.

8 **SECTION 17.** 106.50 (6m) (d) of the statutes is amended to read:

9 106.50 **(6m)** (d) If the attorney general has reasonable cause to believe that any
10 person is engaged in a pattern or practice of discrimination in violation of sub. (2),
11 (2m) ~~or~~, (2r), or (3) or that any person has been denied any of the rights granted under
12 sub. (2), (2m) ~~or~~, (2r), or (3), and such denial raises an issue of general public
13 importance, the department of justice may commence a civil action.

14 **SECTION 18.** 106.50 (8) (a) of the statutes is amended to read:

15 106.50 **(8)** (a) If the department finds reasonable cause to believe that an act
16 of discrimination has been or is being committed in violation of this section by a
17 person taking an action prohibited under sub. (2), (2m) ~~or~~, (2r), or (3) and that the
18 person is licensed or chartered under state law, the department shall notify the
19 licensing or chartering agency of its findings and may file a complaint with such
20 agency together with a request that the agency initiate proceedings to suspend or
21 revoke the license or charter of such person or take other less restrictive disciplinary
22 action.

23

(END)