

Reception | Society

Housing Searches in Toronto: Black People Are More Discriminated Against



Under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Ontario Human Rights Code, everyone has the right to equal treatment with respect to occupancy of a dwelling, without discrimination on the basis of race.

PHOTO: RADIO-CANADA / IVANOH DEMERS



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Black people face discrimination "more often than any other group" when looking for housing in Toronto, according to the report *Everyday Racism: Experiences of discrimination in Toronto*. Experts deplore the lack of resources and mechanisms to denounce this injustice.

« We've tried everything »

Aliyah Thomas is a single black woman in her forties, with no pets or children, who works as a flight attendant and has a « perfect » credit score. She says she was racially discriminated against last year.

She wanted to rent a studio apartment at less than 33% of her income. A few days after making an offer, his real estate agent, Obed Jean-Jacques, was informed that the owner wanted to wait to see more.

Aliyah Thomas, a woman in her forties, wanted to rent a small studio apartment under 500 square feet in Toronto. The landlord didn't want to rent it to her because of the color of her skin, she said.


PHOTO: PROVIDED BY ALIYAH THOMAS

The owner then asked Mr. Jean-Jacques to be his client's guarantor and to send monthly cheques in her name. « Although it was a ridiculous request that I had never received before, I accepted », Jean-Jacques said in an email. « "I wanted to put the landlord up against the wall », he says.

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While the offer was still not accepted, he even offered to pay up to 12 months' rent in advance.

 The offer was ultimately turned down, « for no good reason », and the vacant unit remained on the market for up to a month later, the agent said.

 **ICI Toronto**

« I've shared this story with many real estate agents of all ethnicities, and none have been able to give me the potential reason why these white landlords didn't rent to my black client, other than racism. »

— Obed Jean-Jacques, Real Estate Agent

« We tried everything and they didn't want to », says Aliyah Thomas. « If you ask the other landlords I've rented from, I've never missed a payment, I always pay on time. »

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« Treated as if they were dishonest »

The *Toronto Foundation's Toronto Social Capital Study 2022 Everyday Racism: Experiences of discrimination* in Toronto concludes that Black people are more often discriminated against because of their ethnicity than any other group in Toronto. The study also found that « Black Torontonians are often treated as if they were dishonest ».

The *Fighting for Fair Housing* report, published by the Ontario Real Estate Association, adds that when there is discrimination in the process of buying or renting a home, « people don't always know how to report it and enforcement mechanisms are not strong ».

It notes that there is no « simple, effective and secure » mechanism to report such situations and access legal resources to address them.

The *Toronto Social Capital Study 2022 Everyday Racism: Experiences of discrimination* in Toronto was released in March 2023 by the Toronto Foundation and the Environics Institute, in collaboration with 15 partners.

Fighting for Fair Housing, released in September 2022, was prepared by the Ontario Real Estate Association's President's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee.

« He told me I was perfect »

Latoya Williams also experienced what she believes to be discrimination a few years ago.

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« I spoke to the owner on the phone. He'd gotten my application, everything. He told me I was perfect and that he would like to rent me a house », she says. However, when she visited, she felt that something was wrong.

In the evening, she received a text message saying that she « was not a good fit » and that he had decided to rent the house to someone else.

Latoya Williams asked a white friend of hers who has a similar job, credit score and salary to her to apply. « She went to see the house and he immediately offered to rent » it," she said.

« *Because of the colour of my skin, I was discriminated against.* »

— Latoya Williams

After this event, Latoya Williams created the Facebook group Black Housing Directory Renting While Black, to help Black people find housing and tenants. The group now has nearly 10,000 members.

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« Even though there are resources, it takes a lot of time and housing is an immediate need, » she points out.

« Putting together a case »

Housing is an absolute human right. According to Aline Nizigama, Executive Director of the YWCA Canada, we need to make people aware that discrimination is not acceptable and inform victims that there are remedies.

« "We also need political interventions through our laws to show [what the consequences are] when we find discriminatory fault in a landlord », " she said.

Nizigama also advises people to document everything when they think they may be discriminated against. « In the long run, you can build a case », she says, admitting that it's often difficult to engage in this type of process.

« "I needed to find a place to live and I didn't have time to sit there and think about it and try to figure out why they didn't choose me, so I just gave up and started looking for other things »,," says Thomas, although she encourages people to speak out.

Piera Savage, interim legal director of the Black Legal Action Center, has heard this type of story many times.

« *The challenge with this type of discrimination is that it can be very subtle.* »

— Piera Savage, Interim General Counsel of the Black Legal Action Center

She explained that the Human Rights Tribunal allows « circumstantial evidence » to be adduced and has a duty to consider it. « If the landlord can't give a reasonable explanation for his behaviour, he could find discrimination, says the » lawyer.



Lounan Charpentier

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