

**Georgia Commission  
on Equal Opportunity**  
Office of the Governor

# **Working Toward Housing Access For All**

*Georgia House Rural Development Council*

*November 16, 2023*

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## • **What is the Georgia Commission on Equal Opportunity (GCEO)?**

- Created by the Passage of House Bill 1711 in 1978
- A State Agency under the auspices of the Office of the Governor whose primary purpose is to safeguard individuals from discrimination in housing and employment
- Enforces the Georgia Fair Employment Practices Act & the Georgia Fair Housing Law

# GCEO'S MISSION & VISION

GCEO is charged with enforcing the State of Georgia's anti-discrimination laws in the areas of employment and housing. GCEO promotes and protects civil rights throughout the state, and works to eliminate and prevent discrimination through compliance, investigation, education and outreach, mediation, and enforcement.

GCEO will ensure equal treatment of all Georgians and foster a more open and receptive environment in which to conduct business, live, and work. GCEO is dedicated to promoting fair and inclusive communities and workplaces.



# BASIC PRINCIPLES OF FAIR HOUSING

## “What does Fair Housing Mean?”

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Fair Housing is the right to choose housing free from unlawful discrimination.

## “What is Housing Discrimination?”

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Housing Discrimination is defined as any attempt to prohibit or limit free and fair housing choice. A person or entity who has violated a fair housing statute has committed housing discrimination.

## “Why Fair Housing?”

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Access to Housing correlates with access to:

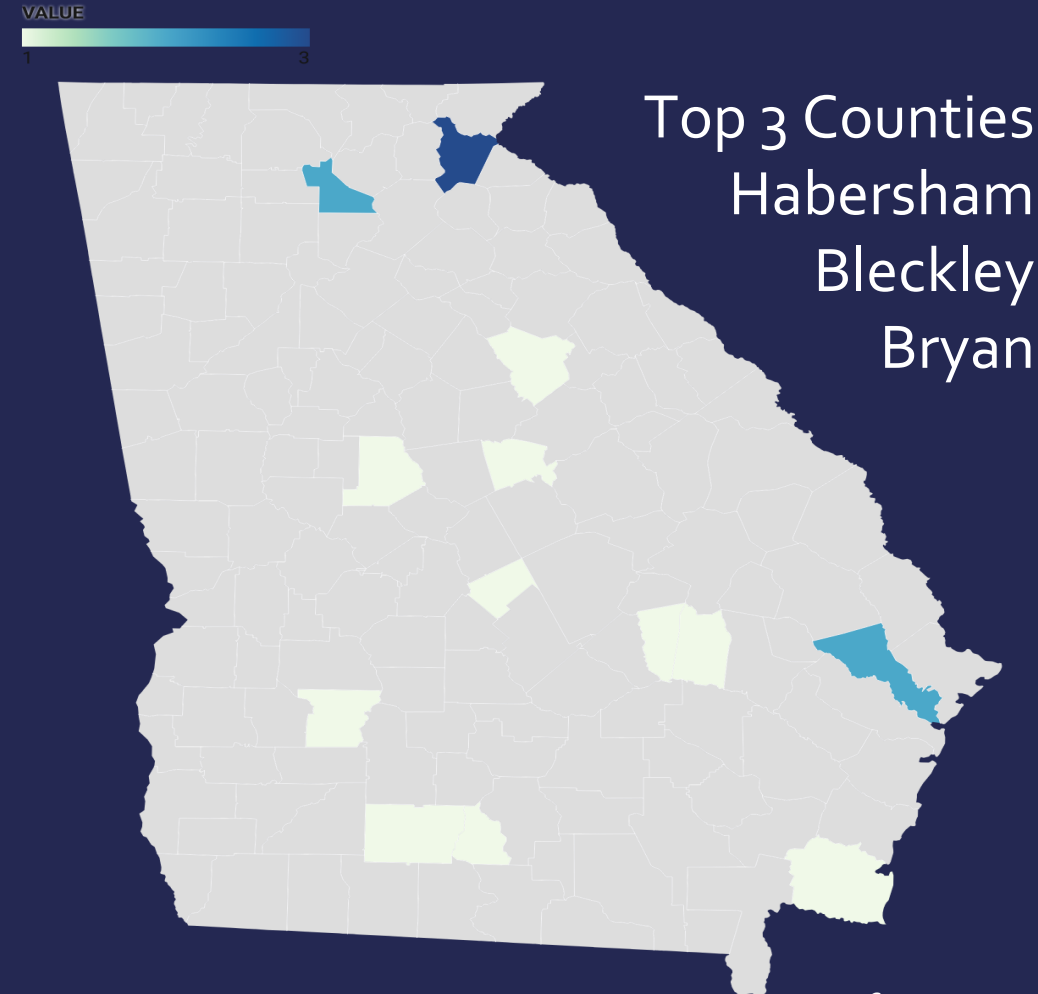
- Opportunity
- Education/Schools
- Healthcare
- Jobs
- Food
- Transportation
- Community Amenities
- Municipal Services

# BARRIERS TO FAIR HOUSING IN RURAL GEORGIA

- Lack of fair housing knowledge among members of the public, housing providers, financial institutions, and local government officials
- Difficulty securing suitable, accessible housing for residents with disabilities and language barriers
- Negative stigma and stereotypes associated with civil rights due to a lack of understanding and misconceptions
- Lack of affordability and various housing options
- Noncompliance with existing fair housing laws and regulations
- Limited fair housing infrastructure
- Fear of retaliation

# RURAL GEORGIA COUNTIES – 2022 NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS FILED

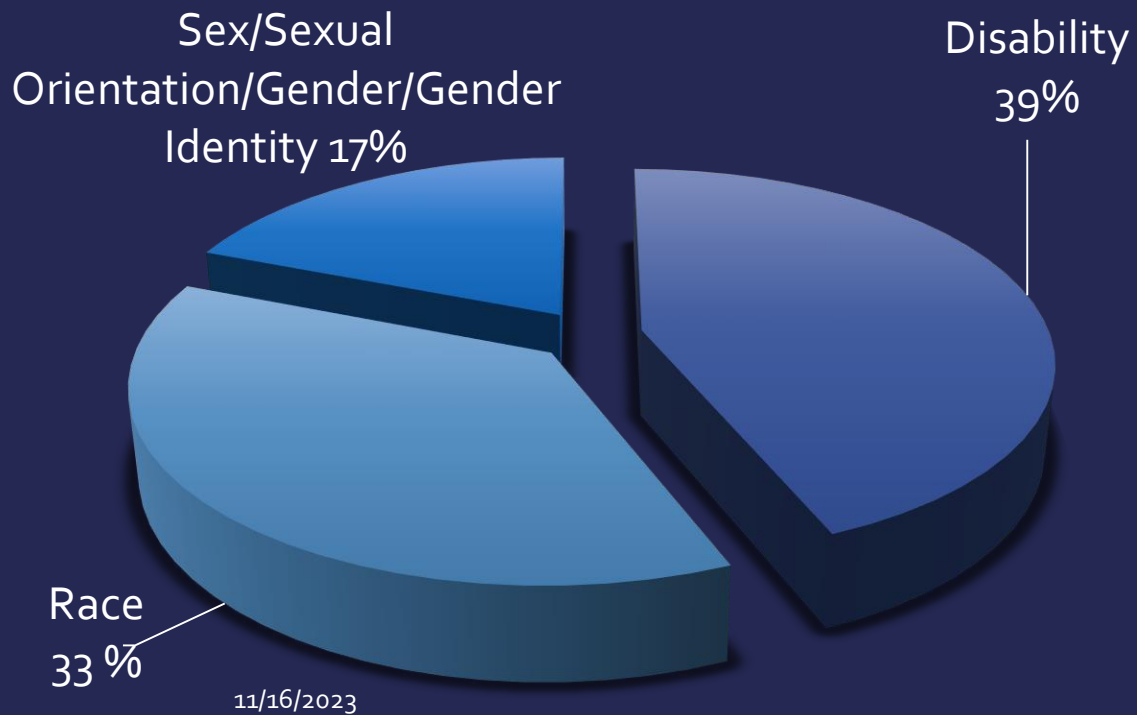
Counties	Number of Cases
Baldwin	1
Bleckley	2
Bryan	2
Camden	1
Colquitt	1
Cook	1
Dawson	2
Habersham	3
Greene	1
Lee	1
Monroe	1
Montgomery	1
Toombs	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>



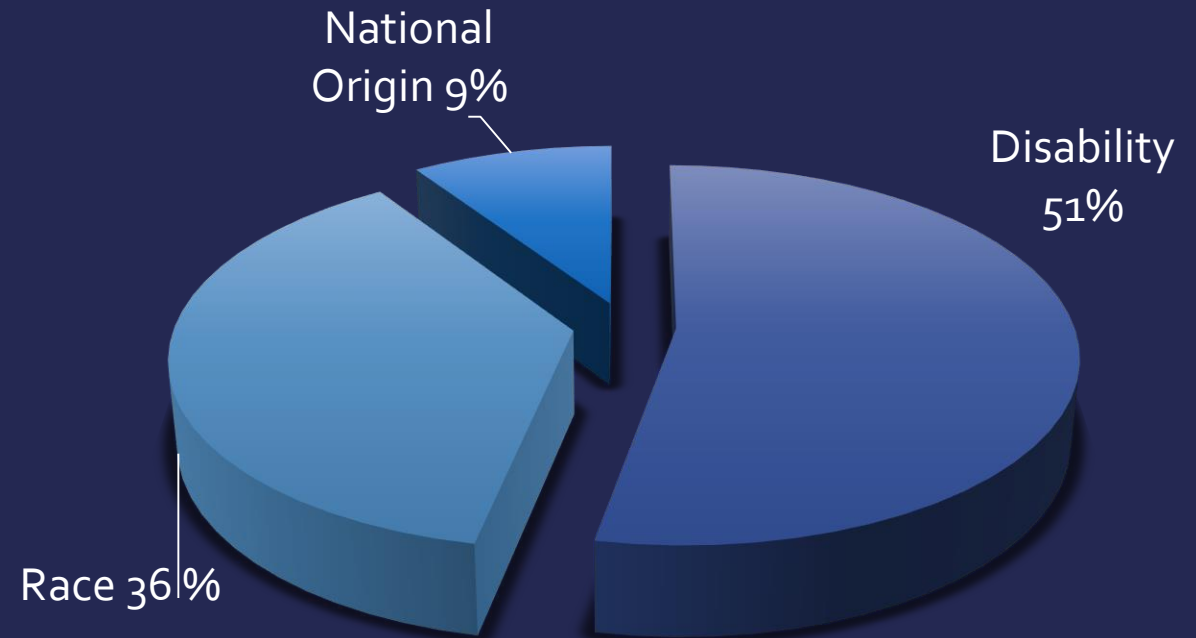
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# TOP THREE PROTECTED CLASSES FILED

## Rural Counties



## Statewide



# TOP THREE ISSUES FILED

## Rural Counties

Different Terms  
and Conditions  
72%

Discriminatory  
Statements,  
Advertisements, &  
Notices 44%

Refusing to Rent  
28 %



11/16/2023

## Statewide

Different Terms  
and Conditions  
72%

Failure to Make  
Reasonable  
Accommodations 39%

To Otherwise Make  
Unavailable or  
Deny 42 %  
8





# FAIR HOUSING CASE HIGHLIGHTS

## Holton v. City of Dallas Housing Authority

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Basis: Disability  
Issue(s): Denial of a Reasonable  
Accommodation

A female with a physical disability (double amputee) whose reasonable modification request to be moved to a handicap accessible unit or have a ramp constructed to her unit was denied by the Respondents (Local Housing Authority)

## Boehmer v. Atlanta Fine Homes- Sotheby's International Realty

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Basis: Familial Status  
Issue(s): Refusal to Rent

A female and a mother of three children who was denied an opportunity to rent a 5 bedroom / 4 bath single family home that was previously for sale because of her family composition by the Respondents (Reputable Realty Company & Homeowners)

# RURAL FAIR HOUSING CASE HIGHLIGHTS

Case Name: Confidential

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Basis: Familial Status

Issue(s): Discriminatory Statements & Discriminatory Terms & Conditions

A property management company enforced overly restrictive rules against families with children. A mass text was issued to the community stating "Children under 16 must be supervised by an adult at all times" or words to that effect.

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Powell v. Karren McGhee

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Basis: Familial Status

Issue(s): Refusal to Rent, Discriminatory Statements, & Discriminatory Terms & Conditions

A female and mother of two children was denied an opportunity to rent a dwelling because she was not a student, and "they do not accept people with children because the walls are too thin."

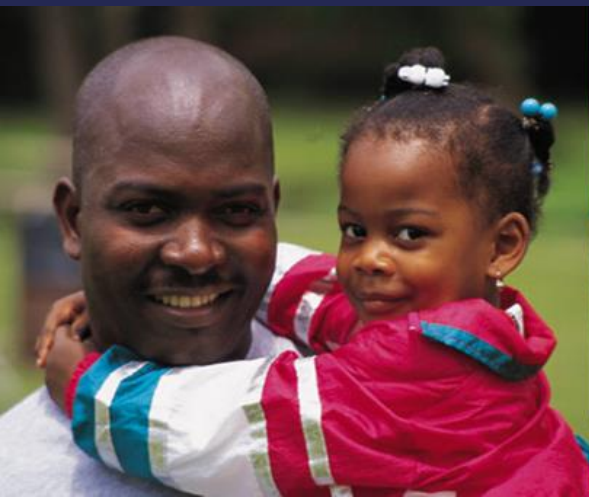
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# SOLUTIONS TO RURAL FAIR HOUSING BARRIERS

ENFORCEMENT

EDUCATION & OUTREACH

INITIATIVES



# ENFORCEMENT | EDUCATION & OUTREACH

## Enforcement



## Education & Outreach



# PENALTIES & FINES UNDER THE GFHL

## Fines

- Up to \$10,000, if the Respondent has not previously been found guilty of committing a discriminatory housing practice
- Up to \$25,000, if the Respondent has been found guilty of committing one prior discriminatory housing practice within the proceeding five years
- Up to \$50,000, if the Respondent has been found guilty of committing two or more discriminatory housing practices within the proceeding seven years

## Relief

- Actual Damages
  - Moving Expenses
  - Rent Differences
  - Mileage, Time Spent, etc.
- Compensatory Damages
  - Emotional Distress, Humiliation
  - Deprivation of Civil Rights
- Punitive Damages
  - Awarded for intentional or willful or malicious conduct
  - Intended to punish the Respondent
- Civil Penalty to the State (\$50,000-100,000)
- Attorney's Fees and Court Costs



# 2023 FAIR HOUSING INITIATIVES

## Small Business Initiative

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- Educate housing providers by conducting two (2) free trainings for small businesses in the business of real estate.
- Expand awareness about the rights and responsibilities of housing providers.
- Promote integrated communities by fostering a more inclusive environment for Georgians to live.

## Connecting with Rural Georgia

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- Educate rural Georgia localities by conducting two (2) free technical trainings in areas of rural Georgia with economic challenges and lessening populations.
- Aid local governments and constituents with tools and resources needed to expand economic opportunities, provide affordable housing, and improve rural communities.

# QUESTIONS?

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