

Justice Department Files Proposed Settlement of Fair Housing Act Lawsuit Against Landlord for Housing Discrimination Based on Disability

The Justice Department filed a proposed settlement of a lawsuit alleging that a Waunakee, Wisconsin, landlord and apartment complex owner violated the Fair Housing Act by discriminating against two residents of Applewood Apartments based on disability.

“Persons with disabilities, like all Americans, have the right to live in housing free of discrimination and harassment from both landlords and tenants,” said Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Vanita Gupta, head of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division. “The Civil Rights Division remains committed to enforcing the Fair Housing Act and ensuring that all individuals are able to enjoy the rights it guarantees.”

“The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination on many bases, including disability,” said U.S. Attorney John W. Vaudreuil of the Western District of Wisconsin. “Persons living with disabilities have an equal right to protection under the Act and we will enforce the Act when such offensive conduct interferes with their rights to use and enjoyment of their home.”

“No family should have to endure degrading insults and comments in the place they call home,” said Gustavo Velasquez, HUD’s Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity. “Today’s settlement reflects HUD and the Justice Department’s ongoing commitment to taking appropriate action against individuals who violate the housing rights of persons with disabilities.”

The lawsuit, filed today along with a proposed settlement in the U.S. District Court of the Western District of Wisconsin, alleges that defendants Applewood of Cross Plains LLC (ACP) and William Ranguette discriminated against two residents of Applewood Apartments, a mother and daughter living together, and denied them rights by refusing to renew the residents’ lease because of their disabilities; demanding that they develop a “plan” to deal with the daughter’s purported disability-related behavior (she is a person with Down Syndrome); and pressuring them to move.

Furthermore, the United States alleges that all defendants, which include the residential apartment manager of the building, discriminated against the two residents by failing to take prompt action to correct and end disability-related harassment by other tenants. From the moment the residents moved into the building, other tenants made such statements as calling the daughter “mentally retarded,” and stating “You don’t belong here. . . you belong in an institution.” Complaints to the landlord and building manager, including that other tenants continued with offensive comments, followed them around the building, and interfered with their use of the premises, went unaddressed.

Under the terms of the settlement, which is subject to approval by the U.S. District Court, defendants will pay the complainants \$40,000 in damages. Although denying the allegations, defendants ACP and Ranguette have also agreed to maintain non-discrimination housing policies, advertise that they are equal opportunity housing providers and attend fair housing training.

Fighting housing discrimination is a top priority of the Justice Department. The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex familial status, national origin and disability. More information about the Civil Rights Division and the laws it enforces is available at www.justice.gov/crt. Individuals who believe that they have been victims of housing discrimination can call the Housing Discrimination Tip Line at [1-800-896-7743](tel:1-800-896-7743), e-mail the Justice Department at fairhousing@usdoj.gov

Email links icon

or contact the Department of Housing and Urban Development at [1-800-669-9777](tel:1-800-669-9777).

This case was handled by the Civil Rights Division’s Housing and Civil Enforcement Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Leslie Herje of the Western District of Wisconsin.

