



Department of Justice

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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT SUES FITCHBURG, MASS., HOUSING AUTHORITY FOR DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION

WASHINGTON – The Justice Department today announced it has filed suit against the Fitchburg Housing Authority in Fitchburg, Mass., and its Executive Director Robert W. Hill alleging that they violated the Fair Housing Act when they refused to allow a tenant to transfer to a different apartment as a reasonable accommodation for her disabilities.

The suit, filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts, also alleges that the defendants have engaged in a denial of rights to a group of persons or a pattern or practice of discrimination because they implemented reasonable accommodation and transfer policies that discriminated against persons with disabilities other than mobility impairments.

The lawsuit originated from a complaint filed with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) by the complainant. After an investigation, HUD found reasonable cause to believe that unlawful discrimination had occurred and referred the matter to the Justice Department.

“Public housing authorities must operate under the full scope of the Fair Housing Act and not engage in any pattern or practice of discrimination. Reasonable accommodations must be made available to those who need them,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General Loretta King for the Civil Rights Division.

“Landlords need to exercise flexibility and open-mindedness when people with disabilities seek an exception to policies, practices or procedures that may be necessary to afford that person the same enjoyment of an apartment that is enjoyed by others,” said Bryan Greene, General Deputy Assistant Secretary for HUD’s Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity. “Rigid policies that make only limited exceptions for people with disabilities do not take into

consideration the variety of challenges that people face and the need to tailor accommodations to the needs of a specific individual.”

The suit seeks monetary damages for the victims, a court order barring future discrimination, and a civil penalty. The complaint is an allegation of unlawful conduct. The allegations must still be proven in federal court.

Fighting illegal 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.usdoj.gov/crt. Additional information about the Fair Housing Act is also available at www.HUD.gov.

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