



Department of Justice

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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT SETTLES ALLEGATIONS OF SEX DISCRIMINATION AGAINST KNOXVILLE LANDLORDS

WASHINGTON - The Justice Department today reached an agreement with the owners and managers of several rental properties in Knoxville, Tenn., to resolve allegations of systemic discrimination against female tenants. The settlement, pending approval by the U.S. District Court in Knoxville, will require the defendants to pay a total of \$110,000 to nine alleged victims and pay a civil penalty to the government of \$15,000.

“Today’s settlement represents another step toward making the American dream a reality for women and families,” said Wan J. Kim, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. “I am proud of the Justice Department’s unprecedented efforts in ensuring that those who engage in discrimination based on sex are prosecuted to the full extent of the law.”

“My office is committed to strenuously enforcing the Fair Housing Act to protect Americans from housing discrimination,” said James R. Dedrick, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Tennessee. “We were pleased to work with the Civil Rights Division in obtaining compensation for victims and protecting vulnerable members of our society from such discrimination in the future.”

The lawsuit alleged that William E. Brewer and co-defendant Lena P. Brewer, owners of several Knoxville properties, violated the Fair Housing Act when William Brewer subjected female tenants to severe, pervasive and unwelcome sexual harassment. Specifically, the complaint alleged that Brewer engaged in unwelcome sexual touching, made verbal sexual advances, entered the homes of female tenants without notice or permission, and threatened to evict female tenants when they refused or objected to his advances. This case was referred to the Justice Department by the City of Knoxville after it received and investigated a number of similar complaints against Brewer.

Under the settlement, the defendants are prohibited from future discrimination based on sex. The agreement also requires the Brewers to retain an independent manager to

operate rental property they own or acquire in the future, should they remain in the rental business within six months after the entry of the settlement.

Fighting illegal housing discrimination is a top priority of the Justice Department. In February 2006, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales announced Operation Home Sweet Home, a concentrated initiative to expose and eliminate housing discrimination in America. This initiative was inspired by the plight of displaced victims of Hurricane Katrina who were suddenly forced to find new places to live. Operation Home Sweet Home is not limited to the areas hit by Hurricane Katrina, and targets housing discrimination across the country.

More information about Operation Home Sweet Home is available at the Justice Department Web site at <http://www.usdoj.gov/fairhousing>. Individuals who believe that they may have been victims of housing discrimination can call our Housing Discrimination Tip Line (1-800-896-7793), email us at fairhousing@usdoj.gov, or contact the Department of Housing and Urban Development at 1-800-669-9777.

The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, familial status, national origin and disability. Since Jan. 1, 2001, the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division has filed 218 cases to enforce the Fair Housing Act, 24 of which have alleged discrimination based on sex. More information about the Civil Rights Division and the laws it enforces is available at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt>.

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