



Department of Justice

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Justice Department Settles Allegations of Sex Discrimination Against Minneapolis Landlords

The Justice Department today announced an agreement with the owners and managers of several rental properties in and around Minneapolis, Minnesota to settle the federal government's allegations of systemic discrimination against female tenants. Under the settlement, which be approved by the U.S. District Court in Minn., the defendants must pay \$352,500 to affected households and pay a civil penalty of \$35,000.

"No woman seeking housing for herself or her family should be subjected to such disgusting, degrading and discriminatory treatment," said Wan J. Kim, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "The Justice Department will remain vigilant in fighting housing discrimination and prosecuting landlords who prey on female tenants."

"Minnesota is a wonderful place to live and raise a family," said Rachel K. Paulose, U.S. Attorney for the District of Minnesota. "We will not allow a few bad rental property owners and managers to tarnish the reputations of the many good people who provide affordable housing to women and their families across the state."

The lawsuit alleged that Robert Wones, as an owner and as a management employee of S& R Property Management; Howard Melin; Welty Properties Inc.; and Shumel Management (the corporate defendants), violated the Fair Housing Act when Wones subjected female tenants to severe, pervasive and unwelcome sexual harassment at eight separate apartment complexes located in and around Minneapolis. Specifically, the complaint alleged that Wones engaged in unwelcome sexual touching of female tenants, made unwelcome sexual advances, conditioned the terms of women's tenancy on the granting of sexual favors, and took adverse actions against female tenants who refused or objected to his sexual advances.

Under the settlement, the corporate defendants who employed Wones are prohibited from future discrimination based on sex. The agreement also provides that Wones, who does not currently own or manage rental properties, must hire an independent management company to operate any rental property that he acquires in the future.

Fighting illegal housing discrimination is a top priority of the Justice Department. In February, 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 all over the country.

More information about Operation Home Sweet Home, can be found at <http://www.usdoj.gov/fairhousing>. Individuals who believe that they may have been victims of housing discrimination can call the Housing Discrimination Tip Line at 1-800-896-7743, email 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 January 21, 2001, the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division has almost doubled the number of pattern or practice of sexual harassment cases filed under the Fair Housing Act, as compared to the preceding five and a half years. For more information about the Civil Rights Division and the laws it enforces, go to <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt>.