



**United States Department of Justice
United States Attorney's Office
District of Minnesota**

**B. Todd Jones,
United States Attorney**

**Jeanne F. Cooney
Director of Community Relations
(612) 664-5611
email: jeanne.cooney@usdoj.gov**

News Release

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Detroit Lakes landlords agree to pay victim for violating the Fair Housing Act

Two Detroit Lakes landlords who own and rent out several properties in the Detroit Lakes area have entered into an agreement with the federal government to settle allegations that they violated the federal Fair Housing Act by refusing to rent a dwelling to a person because of race. Under the terms of the agreement, filed in the form of a consent decree earlier today in federal court in Minneapolis, Pearl and her son Gregory Beck will pay \$25,500 to the victim of the discrimination. The Becks, who jointly own the property in question, were sued by the U.S. Attorney's Office on May 15, 2009.

Pursuant to the consent decree, the Becks also will refrain from refusing to rent property based on race in the future. In addition, they will display fair housing materials in their rental properties and include the words "Equal Housing Opportunity" in any of their advertising material. Moreover, they will attend an educational training program focusing on the race-related provisions of federal, state, and local fair housing laws.

In its complaint, the federal government alleged that in July of 2007, a prospective tenant responded to an advertisement for a rental unit in Detroit Lakes but was rejected because she was African-American. During an initial telephone conversation, Pearl Beck said the unit, located at 710-712 West Lake Drive, was available. When the prospective tenant arrived to view it, however, Pearl Beck said it was not for rent, adding, "No way. No way. It's not for rent. I can't do this. I'm not renting to these kinds of people."

The prospective tenant contacted Legal Services of Northwest Minnesota, and one of its attorneys called Pearl Beck. She told the attorney that the next door neighbors had informed her they would move out if she rented to "black people." In response, the attorney advised her that it was illegal to refuse to rent to someone because of race.

Ms. Beck then said that the prospective tenant had dogs, and that is why she refused to rent the unit. She also said that the dwelling was too small for the prospective tenant, and that she planned to move into the dwelling herself. In August of 2007, the Becks rented the property to a white male.

On July 27, 2007, the prospective tenant filed a discrimination complaint with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”), alleging housing discrimination based on race. HUD investigated the complaint and, on April 6, 2009, issued a charge of discrimination against the defendants, alleging they had indeed engaged in discriminatory housing practices, based on race, in violation of the Fair Housing Act. This case arose from that charge.

The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, familial status, national origin, and disability. Civil Rights enforcement is a priority of the U.S. Justice Department (“DOJ”), and individuals who believe they have been victims of housing discrimination should call the Housing Discrimination Tip Line (1-800-896-7743), e-mail DOJ at fairhousing@usdoj.gov, or contact HUD at 1-800-669-9777.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Ana Voss represented the United States in this court action.

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