



PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

March 28, 2013

**U.S. ATTORNEY ENTERS INTO A CONSENT DECREE WITH
ALBUQUERQUE RENTAL PROPERTY OWNER**

***Consent Decree Resolves Fair Housing Act Claims
Of Discrimination Against A Tenant With Disabilities***

ALBUQUERQUE – U.S. Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales announced that his office has entered into a court-approved consent decree which resolves the government’s claims that Michael F. Croom, the owner and manager of rental property in Albuquerque, N.M., violated the Fair Housing Act (FHA) by discriminating against a tenant with disabilities.

The government’s civil complaint was filed in federal court in Nov. 2012, on behalf of a tenant who became disabled as a result of a medical condition more than two years after living in a house he and his family rented from Mr. Croom. It alleged that Mr. Croom engaged in discriminatory practices and retaliation based on the tenant’s disability in violation of the FHA by unlawfully refusing to permit the tenant to make reasonable modifications to the rented premises to accommodate the tenant’s disability at the tenant’s own expense and with the assurance that the tenant would restore the premises to their original condition. The complaint also alleged that Mr. Croom unlawfully retaliated against the tenant by evicting him after he requested permission to make reasonable modifications to accommodate his disability.

Under the consent decree, which is effective for three years, Mr. Croom is prohibited from: discriminating against any person in the sale or rental of a dwelling based on a disability; refusing to permit any person with a disability from making reasonable modifications to rental premises that are necessary to accommodate the person’s disability; and intimidating or threatening any person who exercises rights protected by the FHA. The consent decree also requires Mr. Croom to:

- Implement standards and procedures for receiving and handling requests made by persons with disabilities for reasonable modifications and accommodations at his rental properties;
- Inform all tenants upon execution of their leases that they may make reasonable modifications to their dwellings at their own expense to make the dwellings more accessible;

- Include a Reasonable Accommodation or Modification for Persons with Disabilities Policy in all rental leases;
- Notify all persons responsible for the management and maintenance of his rental properties of their obligations under the consent decree;
- Ensure that he and anyone else who has responsibility for management of his rental properties attend an educational program concerning the substantive provisions of federal, state and local fair housing laws and regulations;
- Submit to the government written reports regarding his efforts to comply with the consent decree on a semi-annual basis; and
- Pay a \$200,000 monetary award to the tenant on whose behalf the government's complaint was filed.

The FHA prohibits discrimination in the sale or rental of a dwelling to a buyer or renter because of a disability. Discrimination includes the refusal to permit, at the expense of a person with a disability, reasonable accommodations of the premises where the renter agrees to restore the interior of the premises to their pre-existing condition.

“My Office is committed to ensuring that all New Mexico residents have equal access to housing,” said U.S. Attorney Gonzales. “We will continue to build on the Justice Department’s record of enforcing fair housing laws and removing barriers that are discriminatory to New Mexicans with disabilities.”

The government’s case was litigated by Assistant U.S. Attorney Ruth F. Keegan with assistance from the U.S. Attorneys’ Fair Housing Program in the Justice Department’s Housing and Civil Enforcement Section of the Civil Rights Division.

Fighting illegal discrimination in housing is a top priority of the Department of Justice and the U.S. Attorney’s Offices. 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 laws enforced by the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division and the U.S. Attorney’s Office is available at www.justice.gov/crt. Individuals who believe they have been victims of housing discrimination or have information can call the Housing Discrimination Tip Line at 1-800-896-7743, or email the Department of Justice at www.fairhousing.usdoj.gov.

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