

hud **MEDIA ADVISORY**

Department of Housing and Urban Development – Alphonso Jackson, Secretary
Office of Public Affairs, Washington, DC 20410

HUD CHARGES ILLINOIS LANDLORD WITH VIOLATING THE FAIR HOUSING ACT

Family allegedly denied an apartment because of their children

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development announced today that it has charged an Illinois landlord with violating the Fair Housing Act by allegedly refusing to rent an apartment to a family with three children.

In September 2004, the Complainant made an appointment to view a three-bedroom apartment near Northwestern University that was advertised on Craigslist.com. While viewing the unit, the Complainant informed the owner, Michael Bassali, that she and her three children, ages 8, 10 and 14, and their father would be living in the unit. She alleged that Bassali told her that the unit was usually rented to college students, but that he didn't mind renting to families.

The Complainant signed a lease and paid a security deposit to Bassali. A few days later, she alleges, Bassali left her a message stating that the "owner" no longer wished to rent the apartment to her. Bassali also allegedly told the Complainant that he was concerned that there could be lead-based paint or mold present in the unit, the stairs were unsafe, there may be plumbing problems because there was only one sewer line, and that he feared the children would clog the pipes. Bassali subsequently returned the Complainant's deposit check.

"It is particularly disturbing to think that in 2007 families continue to be turned down for housing simply because they have children," said Kim Kendrick, HUD's Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity. "The Fair Housing Act is clear: Everyone, including families with children, has the right to live where they choose. Anytime that right is violated we will take action."

A hearing on the charge will be held by a U.S. Administrative Law Judge on November 14, 2007, in Chicago, Ill, unless any party elects to have the case heard in U.S. District Court. An election to go to District Court must be made by August 6, 2007.

Housing discrimination charges heard before an administrative law judge carry a maximum civil penalty of \$16,000 for a first offense, in addition to actual damages for the complainant, injunctive or other equitable relief, and attorney fees. Sanctions can be more severe if the respondent has previously violated the Fair Housing Act. Parties also have the right to elect to have their cases heard in federal district court. Should either party elect to go to district court, either party may request a jury trial.

In either forum, the case is brought on behalf of the complainant. Complaints heard before an administrative law judge are litigated by an attorney from HUD, while complaints that

go to federal district court are litigated by an attorney from the Department of Justice. Each party also has the right to be represented by his or her own attorney.

HUD's Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity and its partners in the Fair Housing Assistance Program investigate approximately 10,300 housing discrimination complaints annually. People who believe they are the victims of housing discrimination should contact HUD at 1-800-669-9777 (voice), 800-927-9275 (TTY). Additional information is available at www.hud.gov/fairhousing.

For more information call Shantae Goodloe at #202-708-0685.

July 30, 2007

