

Lesbians fight for equality in housing

By **JUDITH KAFKA**
DAILY STAFF REPORTER

Carla Daniels and Gretchen Fogel consider themselves a family. They have been living together for 16 years. And 15 years ago they participated in a commitment ceremony at the Metropolitan Community Church in Ann Arbor.

Because they are lesbians, however, the University Townhouses in Ann Arbor reportedly told them they did not constitute a family and could therefore not apply for family housing.

"We were rather shocked that this happened," Fogel explained in an interview. "We had never had any problems before and we were shocked and angry."

Earlier this month, with the support of the Fair Housing Center of Washtenaw County, the two filed a civil rights suit against the cooperative and its past and present board presidents.

The women are asking for more than \$10,000 in damages.

No cooperative board members would comment on the case.

According to the suit, Daniels and Fogel applied for an apartment March 4, 1991. The cooperative, which is a complex of federally-funded low-income townhouses not connected to the University, informed them that applicants had to be related by blood or marriage to apply for a family apartment.

The housing application form reads, "Unmarried couples (male and female) constitute a family too." How-

COUPLE

Continued from page 1

ever, when Daniels and Fogel pointed this out, the cooperative still refused their application, according to the suit.

David Thompson, the cooperative's board president at the time, explained in a letter to the couple that the cooperative's definition of a family had "been used since the Co-op was created 20 years ago," and invited them to apply separately instead.

At that point they began making phone-calls, and discovered the Fair Housing Center, which deals with complaints of housing discrimination and assists people in taking appropriate steps. "In this instance, after investigating the claims, (the center and Daniels and Fogel) decided to file a suit," Executive Director Pam Kisch said.

In the suit, Daniels and Fogel claim discrimination based on gender and marital status. "If one of them had been a man, they would have been able to get housing," explained Helen Gallagher, the attorney representing the couple and the center.

According to the suit, the cooperative's policy violates the Ann Arbor municipal code, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex, marital status and sexual orientation.