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Landlords settle family bias cases

Federal housing violations alleged

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Mitch Abrams and his wife Sue Dible loved the Ypsilanti apartment they went to see two years ago.

The nonsmoking complex was perfect for the younger of their two boys, Logan, who had a respiratory ailment and was struggling with second-hand smoke wafting through the vents of their neighbor's apartment in a different location.

Even after the landlord quoted monthly rent \$100 higher than what was advertised, according to their federal complaint, they left a message later that day that they'd take it, but never heard back.

The case is one of two in which area landlords have recently settled complaints alleging violation of federal housing laws by discriminating against families with children trying to rent apartments.

The Abrams-Dible case was dismissed with prejudice in October by a U.S. District Court judge in Detroit, and the family accepted a \$20,000 settlement from the defendants, according to their attorney, Jonathan Weber, and co-complainant, the Fair Housing Center of Southeastern Michigan.

John Adams, the owner of Scott's House Apartments on Perrin Street in Ypsilanti, declined to comment publicly.

In the other case, the defendant, Dawn Simpson, who had a 3-year-old son, alleged in her complaint that Arbor Apartments on Packard Road in Ann Arbor told her no children were allowed. She and the center cited the Fair Housing Act and state laws in her March 2008 complaint.

Simpson accepted \$15,000 to settle her case in December, according to court documents.

A woman who answered the phone at Allmand Properties, owner of the complex, said she had no comment but would pass the message along to one of the company's owners.

The cases underscore the importance of laws to protect against discrimination in housing, say fair housing advocates.

Federal law prohibits housing discrimination against families with children under 18. For example, landlords may not locate families with children in a certain portion of a complex or place an unreasonable restriction on the total number of people who can live there.

"Family status discrimination is a big problem, and I hope these cases will let landlords know that there are people looking at it and we will try to stop it," said Weber, who represented both plaintiffs.

Pamela Kisch, executive director of the center, said 93 complaints were lodged with the center in 2008 out of Washtenaw County, about 13 percent of which were based on family status. Most complaints filed with the center do not wind up in court, she said.

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