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Ann Arbor apartment complex faces federal fair housing lawsuit

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A federal lawsuit accuses an Ann Arbor apartment complex of discriminating against prospective black renters during fair housing tests conducted over the past several years.

The Fair Housing Center of Southeastern Michigan is suing Troy-based Acme Investments, Inc., owner of Ivanhoe House Apartments, and the apartment complex's resident manager, Laurie Courtney.

The suit alleges violations of the federal Fair Housing Act and seeks unspecified damages.

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Courtney declined to comment Wednesday; Acme officials could not be reached for comment.

The Fair Housing Center sent both black and white "testers" to the 48-unit complex off Packard Street to inquire about renting there beginning in 2006, the suit says.

The black testers, who were slightly more qualified to rent, were repeatedly discriminated against during the undercover operation, the suit alleges.

For instance, a white female tester visited the complex April 18, 2008, and met with Courtney to ask about renting a two-bedroom apartment for her and her husband. Courtney told her such an apartment would be available April 23 and showed it to her, the suit says.

Less than an hour later, a black female tester asked about renting the same size apartment for her and her husband.

Courtney "barely opened the door" for the black tester and "told her that she would not have anything available until July or August," according to the suit.

The black tester asked to see the apartment, the suit says, but was told it was occupied. About an hour later, another white tester asked about renting a two-bedroom apartment for her and her husband. She was shown the same apartment as the first white tester and was told it would be available at the end of the month, and a second apartment would be available in mid-June, the suit alleges.

The Fair Housing Center, an Ann Arbor-based nonprofit, began monitoring the complex after a black family with children complained about discrimination there in 1999, according to the center's executive director, Pam Kisch.

Kisch would not say whether complaints had been filed against the complex since.

The center received 112 fair housing complaints last year in Washtenaw, Monroe and Lenawee counties - down 30 from a year earlier, Kisch said.

Since December, the center's reach has expanded into Ingham, Livingston and Jackson counties, Kisch said.

Lee Higgins covers police and courts for AnnArbor.com. You can reach Higgins by phone at (734) 623-2527 or email at leehiggins@annarbor.com

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