

GRAND RAPIDS NEWS

MSU sorority wrongly rejects rabbit as support animal, lawsuit says

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File photo of a Netherlands dwarf rabbit.
(Dan Gleiter | PennLive.com)

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By John Agar, jagar@mlive.com

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GRAND RAPIDS, MI - A former Michigan State University student who suffered chronic anxiety and panic attacks is suing after her sorority house manager allegedly rejected her emotional-support animal, a Netherlands dwarf rabbit.

Sebastian.

<http://s.mlive.com/O1>

The case is a little unusual but Wyandotte attorney Kerry Morgan said his client, Kayla Hicks, has a documented medical need for a support animal. He contends the defendants violated her right to reasonable accommodations for her disability.

"This is a housing case, not a pet-accommodation case," Morgan told MLive/The Grand Rapids Press on Friday, Nov. 16. His client wants the sorority to "step up and do a better job going forward with other students."

Hicks, who no longer lives in Michigan, filed the lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Grand Rapids against Tennessee-based Alpha Omicron Pi Fraternity Inc. and Alpha Omicron Pi Properties Inc.

Messages were left with the agency seeking comment.

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Morgan alleged his client suffered handicap discrimination under the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988, or FHAA. He says Hicks is considered disabled under the FHAA as well as the Michigan Persons with Disabilities Civil Rights Act.

Hicks has suffered anxiety, including panic attacks, for several years. Her psychiatrist recommended she use an emotional-support animal.

Hicks was accepted by Alpha's sorority chapter, Beta Gamma, provided paperwork for her support animal and moved in on Aug. 20, 2017, the lawsuit said.

The rabbit was determined healthy and social by a veterinarian. Hick's registered the rabbit on the National Service Animal Registry at the property director's request, the lawsuit said.

On Sept. 1, 2017, the defendants denied her accommodation request for the support animal.

Hicks filed complaints with the Fair Housing Center of Southeast and Mid Michigan, Michigan Department of Civil Rights and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

She brought the rabbit to the sorority house for her birthday that November, with approval of the house manager, but was soon told it had to go, the lawsuit said.

Hicks had returned the rabbit to the sorority house when she

was told just before Spring Break that headquarters had not approved her support animal. She was allegedly told she would be evicted if she brought it back after the break.

When Hicks returned from the break, she moved the rabbit out. She said she was forced out of the sorority house.

Morgan believed that his client's roommates were OK with the rabbit. It was small, and didn't make noise or bother anyone, he said.

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