

Fair Housing Center of Southeast & Mid Michigan

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A copy of the filed complaint is available upon request.

New Fair Housing Lawsuit Filed Against MSU Sorority

Kayla Hicks is suing Alpha Omicron Pi (AOII) for denying her the right to live in the sorority with an emotional support animal (ESA) while she was a student at Michigan State University.

According to the complaint taken by the Fair Housing Center of Southeast & Mid Michigan in the fall of 2017, though her need for the animal was well documented, AOII refused to allow her to bring her emotional support animal, a two-pound Netherland Dwarf Rabbit named Sebastian, to the sorority. Ms. Hicks was in close communication with the national offices of the sorority during the summer of 2017. She provided the organization with proof that she had a disability and needed the ESA.

On September 1, 2017, after MSU classes began and Ms. Hicks had already moved into the sorority house for her senior year, Mandy Doyle, Director of Properties at the national headquarters in Tennessee, sent an email stating:

“Hi Kayla, The decision is based upon our global policy created by AOII Properties to not allow emotional support animals. It is in AOII Properties good faith belief that the chapter house falls under the private club exemption as in the Fair Housing Act that you have mentioned in your email below. Thank you, Mandy”

“Kayla Hicks provided the sorority with all the documents necessary to show that she had a disability and needed an emotional support animal, yet they still denied her request,” stated Niki Green, Coordinator of Investigations and Legal Research from the Fair Housing Center.

Discrimination is defined in the Fair Housing Amendments Act to include refusing “to make reasonable accommodations in rules, policies, practices, or services” when necessary to afford such person with a disability an “equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling.”

In March of 2018, the national office of the sorority demanded that Ms. Hicks drop the complaint that she had filed with the Michigan Department of Civil Rights (in conjunction with her complaint to the FHC) before they discuss any possible agreement to allow the ESA. Two days later, before she could even consider the offer, local AOII staff said she would be evicted from the house. After the eviction threat, Ms. Hicks moved out of the sorority. The Fair Housing Center referred her to an attorney for litigation.

Fair Housing Center Cooperating Attorney Kerry L. Morgan of Pentiuk, Couvreur & Kobiljak filed the fair housing complaint in U.S. Federal Court on November 14, 2018. The case has been assigned to the Honorable Robert J. Jonker.

Photographs: Sebastian and Kayla Hicks. Photographs provided by Kayla Hicks.



The Fair Housing Center of Southeast & Mid Michigan, founded in 1992, actively protects the civil rights of those who are discriminated against in the rental, sale, or financing of housing through investigation, education, advocacy, and legal action. The FHC takes an average of 160 complaints each year from its eight-county service area – Ingham, Clinton, Eaton, Jackson, Lenawee, Livingston, Monroe, and Washtenaw counties.

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