

Fair Housing Center of Southeast & Mid Michigan
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FHC Settles Case for Wheelchair User Forced to Crawl into Home

The Fair Housing Center of Southeast & Mid Michigan has assisted in the settlement of a housing discrimination lawsuit against Group Five Management Company and TG Properties LLC, the owners of Randolph Court Apartments in Ann Arbor.

Sarah Tankson, who has a debilitating neurological disorder known as dystonia, contacted the Fair Housing Center in January 2017 for help with a request for reasonable accommodation. Prior to signing a lease at Randolph Court, the manager stated in writing that Ms. Tankson would be able to install a wheelchair ramp upon move in, as she uses a wheelchair and the home she planned to rent had three steps from the sidewalk to the front door.

According to the lawsuit, once Ms. Tankson moved in, Randolph Court Apartments management told her that “she and health aide [Karen Kelsey] must remove [her temporary ramp] and stow it away after each use.” Because it was not possible for her to stow and then reconstruct the ramp each time she needed to use it, she and her aide complied by removing the materials, thus forcing Ms. Tankson to remain shut in her apartment or crawl out of her unit on days she required outside care. Ms. Tankson missed many medical appointments as a result of being unable to safely leave her apartment, which caused the symptoms of her disability to worsen.

This dire situation forced Ms. Kelsey to redouble her effort to locate a contractor to install a more secure removable wheelchair ramp. These efforts received media attention from WXYZ Channel 7 in Detroit, which did several pieces on the story (see links below). Thanks to the televised news coverage, a volunteer contractor agreed to construct and install the ramp, and raised contributions to cover the cost of the materials.

Randolph Court management, however, would not allow the ramp until it received and approved the plans. The Fair Housing Center worked with Ms. Tankson and the contractor to provide the plans to Randolph Court management on February 28, 2017, and asked for written approval by March 1, 2017, as the contractor was ready to install the ramp. No response was given. Instead, management contacted Ms. Tankson on March 2, 2017, stating she could have a temporary ramp installed only if she moved into a different apartment unit, because they did not want any bushes removed or have the ramp go across the walkway in front of her home.

Randolph Court management continued to delay the installation of the ramp by refusing to grant approval to have the ramp installed at Ms. Tankson's unit, even turning away the contractor after he came out to install the ramp. Randolph Court management insisted that Ms. Tankson sign a form to move into a different unit where the ramp would have to be rebuilt and installed, while refusing to pay any of Ms. Tankson's relocation costs. On one occasion, employees from Randolph Court appeared without notice at Ms. Tankson's home with a moving truck, pressuring her to immediately sign a form to transfer her to another unit.

The FHC contacted Group Five Management one last time to remind them that the Federal Fair Housing Act requires housing providers to grant permission for tenants who use wheelchairs to install ramps to make the entrance to their units accessible. The Fair Housing Center never received a response.

FHC Cooperating Attorney Steve Tomkowiak filed the lawsuit on behalf of Ms. Tankson in U.S. Federal District Court on March 15, 2017. The case was assigned to the Honorable Sean F. Cox. Ms. Tankson was permitted to have the ramp installed in April, and the lawsuit settled in July 2017 for a non-disclosed amount.

Related News:

February 21, 2017: WXYZ [Handicapped woman with no ramp forced to crawl to enter her home](#)

March 7, 2017: WXYZ [Handicapped woman blocked from building her own wheelchair ramp](#)

March 30, 2017: WXYZ [Disabled Ann Arbor woman gets ramp at home built after WXYZ takes action](#)

April 4, 2017: FHC Press Release [New Fair Housing Case Filed on Behalf of Wheelchair User](#)

Four pictures, (clockwise from left)

#1- (clockwise from top left) Karen Kelsey, FHC staff Niki Green, and Sarah Tankson celebrate the installation of Ms. Tankson's ramp. Photo taken by FHC staff Kristen Cuhran.

#2- Sarah Tankson, pictured with her make-shift ramp. Photo taken by FHC staff Niki Green.

#3- WXYZ Report of February 21, 2017.Screenshot.

#4- The completed ramp outside of Ms. Tankson's apartment. Photo taken by FHC staff Niki Green.



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 150 complaints each year from its eight-county service area – Clinton, Eaton, Ingham, Jackson, Lenawee, Livingston, Monroe, and Washtenaw.

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