

White Lake man suing Brighton property company for not allowing emotional support dogs

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White Lake resident Scott Lorms with his two emotional support animals, dogs named Curiz (left) and Riley (right). Lorms is suing Brighton-based property manager T&R Properties and Zahler Management for denying him the right to apply to rent an apartment in Pinckney because they do not allow dogs but Lorms has a notification from his doctor for them. (Photo: Submitted)

A White Lake man has filed a federal housing discrimination lawsuit against a Brighton-based management company he says refused to rent him an apartment because he has emotional support dogs.

Scott Lorms filed the lawsuit last month in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan. In the suit, Lorms alleges that T&R Properties and Zahler Management denied an apartment rental in Pinckney because they do not allow dogs.

Lorms has two dogs trained as emotional support animals that he uses to cope with a mental and emotional disability.

"The landlord was unwilling to make an exception for Mr. Lorms's emotional support animals," said Francyne Stacey, Lorms's Ann Arbor-based attorney.

T&R Properties and Zahler Management have not responded to requests for comment.

The complaint says Lorms explained to the rental agent that he had emotional support dogs, which are not considered pets under the federal Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988. Lorms said he had documentation from his doctor regarding his disability and training certificates for the animals.

However, the complaint says, Lorms said he was still denied an application.

Stacey is arguing on behalf of Lorms that his rights under the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 were violated.

Amending the Civil Rights Act of 1968, the federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin in housing sales, rentals or financing.

Discrimination includes refusing to make reasonable accommodations in rules, policies, practices, or services in an attempt to create equality to use the space.

The refusal took place in November and Lorms filed a complaint with the Fair Housing Center of Southeast and Mid Michigan.

Since that time, Lorms and his family have had to rent a more expensive apartment that does allow the dogs but is further away from his relatives, friends and employment, Stacey said.

The [rental application](http://tandrproperties.com/rental_app.pdf) (http://tandrproperties.com/rental_app.pdf) on the company's website states "pets are not allowed at some properties. Pets must be preapproved. Deposit and fees are required."

Stacey declined to provide more information on the conditions that cause Lorms to need support animals.

The lawsuit is the first of its kind in Livingston County, said Pam Kisch, executive director of the Fair Housing Center of Southeast and Mid Michigan.

She said emotional support animals fall under the "reasonable accommodation" definition of the Fair Housing Act.

"You think of it as a piece of equipment," Kisch said. "It's a doctor's call. It's in their opinion if they need it."

An emotional support animal can be any animal including a dog, cat, turtle, or rabbit, for example, she said.

Many of the fair housing cases the center works on are often settled before a trial occurs, Kisch said.

The case is assigned to Judge Nancy Edmunds.

A response has yet to be filed by attorneys for T&R Properties and Zahler Management.

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