

## Howell apartment complexes will change occupancy policy after fair housing investigation

Sean Bradley, Livingston Daily Published 6:00 a.m. ET Sept. 19, 2019

A company that manages two Howell-based apartment buildings will change its policy regarding renting to large families after a complaint was filed with the federal government last year.

Two Howell apartment complexes — Prentis Estates Apartments and Yorkshire Place Apartments — limited the number of people who could occupy bedrooms in their apartments.

The apartment complexes, managed by East Lansing-based Management Resources Development, allowed only two people per bedroom in their apartments, regardless of the unit's square footage.

The company has agreed to a settlement with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

"They were definitely following the policies of the larger company, (Management Resources Development), and enforcing overly-restrictive occupancy standards," said Kristen Cuhran Fuller, associate director of the Fair Housing Center of Southeast and Mid Michigan, on Wednesday. "You have to follow local and state laws regarding occupancy."

Management Resources Development did not respond to a request for comment.

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A [complaint was filed \(https://www.scribd.com/document/426452187/Fhcsemand-Fhcci-v-Mrd-Hud-Complaint\)](https://www.scribd.com/document/426452187/Fhcsemand-Fhcci-v-Mrd-Hud-Complaint) with HUD last year by the Fair Housing Center of Southeast and Mid Michigan and the Fair Housing Center of Central Indiana alleging that the company violated federal law by not allowing rentals to families of five or more people, including children.

In June, an agreement was reached (<https://www.scribd.com/document/426452151/MRD-Conciliation-Settlement>) for the company to pay \$45,000 for costs and damages incurred by the fair housing centers. Both organizations' investigations found Management Resources Development was discriminating against large families in its rental policies.

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Management Resources Development, which manages approximately 9,000 properties across 10 states, has agreed to change its occupancy policy to follow the law and will train their employees and agents on fair housing laws and responsibilities.

However, HUD did not find Management Resources Development to be at fault.

The Fair Housing Act of 1968 made it illegal for landlords to not rent to families with children.

The state of Michigan and city of Howell follow the International Property Maintenance Code in regard to occupancy, said Tim Schmitt, Howell community development director.

"The allowable number of occupants is usually based on the size of the unit, with particular emphasis on the square footage of the bedrooms and living areas," according to [a fact sheet from the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan \(http://www.fhcwm.org/uploads/files/Occupancy%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Final.pdf\)](http://www.fhcwm.org/uploads/files/Occupancy%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Final.pdf).

The International Property Maintenance Code states that for a family of five, including children, a bedroom must be a minimum of 50 square feet per occupant.

"It means no matter what, the bedroom has to be 100 square feet for two people and 50 square feet for every additional person," Fuller said.

Prentis Estates Apartments has bedrooms as large as 250 square feet but didn't allow rentals to families of five or more occupants, Fuller said.

"A family of five would go to a place like this and be denied, but that particular unit could have held much more than five people," she said.

A bedroom for a single occupant of an apartment needs to be at least 70 square feet, she said.

The investigation was done by the Fair Housing Center of Southeast and Mid Michigan between August 2016 and December 2017 at five locations across Michigan, including the two in Howell.

It also found that Yorkshire Apartments had an apartment with one bedroom that was 172 square feet, while another bedroom was 128 square feet, and refused rentals to large families, Fuller said.

The Fair Housing Center of Central Indiana also investigated properties and found that the same overly-restrictive occupancy standards were being enforced by the company.

Contact Livingston Daily reporter Sean Bradley at 517-552-2860 or at [sbradley@livingstondaily.com](mailto:sbradley@livingstondaily.com). Follow him on Twitter @SbradleyLD.

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