

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 Sexual Harassment Lawsuit Filed
Fair Housing Suit Also Alleges National Origin Bias

Ingham County~

Sarah Yoder contacted the Fair Housing Center of Southeast & Mid Michigan (FHC) in August 2018 to file a sexual harassment complaint against Ryan McDonell. Ms. Yoder says she was asked to do a striptease in exchange for negotiating a lower rent.

Ms. Yoder, a 39-year-old Native American woman, stated that she had gone to view a one-bedroom house listed for \$700/month in Lansing and that Mr. McDonell gave her a tour.

Later that day, she asked Mr. McDonell, via text, if the rent was negotiable. McDonell responded; "I bet your (sic) more fun to negotiate with in person." Later text messages include asking Ms. Yoder to do a striptease for him. Ms. Yoder's text response was that she was "not a prostitute or a stripper" and she declined to respond to his subsequent text messages.

According to the lawsuit, on August 8, 2018, Ms. Yoder sent a message to another person named "Jason" listing a similar property on Craigslist. Ms. Yoder and a friend went to see the unit, soon realizing it was the same house. When they saw Mr. McDonell waiting there, they began to leave. Then, according to the lawsuit, he screamed discriminatory statements to Ms. Yoder. He texted her again that night asking "u mad that I asked u to wear something cute so I could check u out?"

After the FHC advised her of her rights, Ms. Yoder chose to take her case to litigation. The Fair Housing Center Board of Directors elected to join the lawsuit. FHC Cooperating Attorney Robert M. Howard filed the fair housing complaint based on sex and national origin. The lawsuit alleges violations of the Federal Fair Housing Act and

the Michigan Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act in Federal Court. The case, filed on September 9, 2019, has been assigned to the honorable Robert J. Jonker.

The Fair Housing Center of Southeast and 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 180 complaints each year from its eight-county service area – Clinton, Eaton, Ingham, Jackson, Lenawee, Livingston, Monroe, and Washtenaw.

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