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Ann Arbor

Interracial couple suing Livingston County realtors for racial bias

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Verdell Franklin, a black man, and his wife Julie Franklin, a white woman, were interested in buying a lake house along Zukey Lake in Hamburg Township, Sept. 3, after 10 years of regularly visiting friends who lived in the area. A lawsuit filed Jan. 15, 2021, claims the pair were discriminated against by realtors selling the home. (Photo courtesy Pitt McGehee Palmer Bonanni & Rivers law firm)

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By **[Nathan Clark | nclark1@mlive.com](mailto:nclark1@mlive.com)**

LIVINGSTON COUNTY, MI – An interracial couple is suing Livingston County realtors claiming they were treated unfairly while attempting to make an offer on a lake house in a predominately white neighborhood.

The federal housing discrimination lawsuit was filed Friday, Jan. 15, in the U.S. District



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and Richard Beaudin, violating the federal Fair Housing Act.

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The lawsuit claims Verdell Franklin, a Black man, and his wife Julie Franklin, a white woman, were interested in buying a lake house along Zukey Lake in Hamburg Township, Sept. 3, after 10 years of regularly visiting friends in the area.

The home was listed at \$350,000 with no additional conditions or requirements. The couple requested a tour of the home the day after the home was listed.

The suit claims Ikens showed little interest in selling the house to the couple, did not ask about income or jobs and was surprised when the pair stated they wanted to make an offer on the home.

Verdell Franklin is the CFO for the Toledo Fire Department where he has worked for 29 years and Julie Franklin is a certified registered nurse anesthetist at Toledo Hospital.

The couple were contacted by Ikens later that day stating the listing agent for the home, Beaudin, would only accept a \$350,000 cash only offer and the house would be sold “as is,” the suit claims.

The pair were prepared to make an offer, but the cash offer was too high, the suit claims.

The couple later discovered the home was listed again a month later at \$300,000 and was bought by a white man with a \$225,000 mortgage loan, the suit claims.

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There are no current African American homeowners on Zukey Lake, the couple's attorney Robin Beth Wagner said in a written statement.

Census information indicates that Hamburg Township's population in 2019 was 21,794 people -- of which 97.6 percent were white and less than 0.5 percent were African American, the suit claims.

"It appears that there has never been an African American homeowner in the Zukey Lake neighborhood," Wagner said. "It also appears that the defendants in this case would prefer that it stay that way."

Additionally, the suit claims in June, three months before interacting with the Franklins, Beaudin was fired from his previous employer after he made public comments on his social media accounts in opposition to the Black Lives Matter movement.

The realtors could not be reached for comment and no attorneys have been listed at this time.

The case has been assigned to U.S. District Judge George Caram Steeh. No future court dates have been scheduled as of yet.

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