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NEWS

Fair Housing Center reaches settlement in lawsuit against landlord who asked for striptease

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Fair housing advocates have settled a federal lawsuit for an undisclosed amount of money against a Lansing landlord accused of asking a prospective tenant for a striptease and calling her a racial slur.

U.S. District Court Judge Phillip Green dismissed the lawsuit after the Fair Housing Center of Southeast and Mid Michigan reached an agreement with landlord Ryan McDonell late last month.

The center argued McDonell violated the federal Fair Housing Act by discriminating against Sarah Yoder, a tenant who had toured one of his properties. The suit, filed last year, also accused McDonell of violating Michigan's Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights law, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, sex and national origin among other categories.

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Yoder said McDonell harassed her by making sexual comments after she reached out in 2018 about renting a Lansing home.

In one instance, Yoder asked about negotiating a lower rent, and McDonell replied "I really liked that dress U had on the other day, any chance you would give me a striptease starting with a dress like that? I'd assume we could make a deal after that," according to text messages attached as evidence to the lawsuit.

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In another instance, Yoder said McDonell told her he "masturbated while watching her through the windows" before their first meeting and that he berated her, calling her an "Indian b—," according to the suit.

Yoder is Native American.

The suit also named McDonell's wife, Sandy, as a defendant since the couple co-owned rental properties through their limited liability company Haven Homesteads.

The McDonells' attorney did not respond to a request for comment Thursday afternoon.

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