

Advertisement

ANN ARBOR

Ann Arbor landlord sued for allegedly refusing to rent to people with housing vouchers

Published: Apr. 21, 2023, 1:23 p.m.



NEW!

By [Ryan Stanton | ryanstanton@mlive.com](mailto:ryanstanton@mlive.com)

ANN ARBOR, MI — A new lawsuit claims an Ann Arbor landlord has had a policy of illegally refusing to rent to people who use government-issued housing vouchers to pay rent.

Ann Arbor resident Megan Morse filed her case against the [Wilson White Company Inc.](#) in Washtenaw County Circuit Court on Wednesday, April 19, seeking a judgment declaring the property management company violated the city's non-discrimination ordinance, which in part makes it illegal to deny someone housing based on their source of income.

The city expanded the law in 2020 to define housing vouchers as a source of income.

"I was born in Ann Arbor and I love the city," Morse said in a statement. "But my epilepsy and other disabilities make it impossible for me to earn enough money to pay Ann Arbor rent because it's so expensive. I was so excited to move back to Ann Arbor when the Ann Arbor Housing Commission awarded me a housing voucher. But I was heartbroken and humiliated when a landlord refused to honor the voucher and rejected me."

The Civil Rights Litigation Initiative at the University of Michigan Law School is representing Morse in what it calls a first-of-its-kind lawsuit to enforce Ann Arbor's law barring source-of-income discrimination and an important case addressing a widespread housing discrimination problem in Ann Arbor.

"Ann Arbor enacted an ordinance to make the city more welcoming to lower-income residents like Megan Morse," Rebecca Lowy, one of the student attorneys with the initiative, said in a statement. "This lawsuit puts Ann Arbor landlords on notice that discrimination against people with housing vouchers will no longer be tolerated."

Other student attorneys working on the case include Elyse O'Neill and Lauren Yu. The Civil Rights Litigation Initiative is led by UM law professor Mike Steinberg.

Morse relies on Social Security and housing choice vouchers to pay rent and she applied to Arbor Hills Apartments and Wyndham Hill Apartments, both Ann Arbor apartment complexes owned and operated by Wilson White, the lawsuit states. Wilson

White representatives told Morse and a tester from the Fair Housing Center of Southeast and Mid Michigan the company would not accept vouchers, the lawsuit states.



Wyndham Hill Apartments on Stadium Boulevard in Ann Arbor on April 21, 2023. Ryan Stanton | The Ann Arbor News

Representatives for Wilson White did not respond to requests for comment on Friday, April 21.

“Wilson White Company is dedicated to providing our residents with a great living environment, observing the highest ethical standards with a reputation for honesty, integrity and professionalism,” the company states on its website, indicating it has existed since 1946 and is led by Board Chair Andrew Copp and President James Schmunk.

In addition to Arbor Hills and Wyndham Hill, the company’s other apartment communities include Nob Hill Apartments in Ann Arbor and River Drive Apartments in Ypsilanti.

The lawsuit asks the court for an injunction to prohibit future source-of-income discrimination and to award compensation to Morse for application costs, emotional distress, loss of civil rights, loss of housing, and humiliation and embarrassment.

The complaint details the circumstances of Morse's apartment search and the less-preferable living situation she landed in after allegedly being denied by Wilson White.

After separating from her domestic partner of 12 years and temporarily living with her mother in Jackson last year, she wanted to move back to Ann Arbor to be close to her daughter and the University of Michigan Hospital, where she participates in studies to develop treatments for epilepsy, the lawsuit states.

After being turned away by Arbor Hills Apartments and Wyndham Hill Apartments in December, she was approved for another apartment on the far south side of town in January, farther from her daughter and the hospital, according to the complaint.

“Her apartment is within walking distance of only one bus line — which does not go directly to the hospital — and no other amenities,” the lawsuit states. “The bus ride to the hospital is approximately 40 minutes including transfers.”



Because housing choice vouchers are paid directly to landlords by the Housing Commission, there is little risk of tenants failing to pay rent, according to the Civil Rights Litigation Initiative.

“Housing choice vouchers are meant to level the playing field for low-income families, who are often people of color, people with disabilities, and solo mothers — groups most likely to face housing discrimination,” Pam Kisch, director of the Fair Housing Center, said in a statement.

“Ann Arbor can be a great place to live with excellent schools, job opportunities, public transportation, parks and cultural opportunities,” she said. “It’s also very expensive and we shouldn’t add more barriers to living here than already exist.”

The Civil Rights Litigation Initiative posted a [YouTube video](#) further discussing the case, which is pending before Judge Tim Connors.

MORE FROM THE ANN ARBOR NEWS:

[Ann Arbor renters get expanded rights with 10-1 final OK of new law](#)

[Despite pushback from landlords, Ann Arbor bans criminal background checks](#)

[Ann Arbor OKs conceptual plan for 157 housing units across from YMCA](#)

[State and polluter may get their way in Ann Arbor dioxane plume case](#)

[Ann Arbor officials give thumbs down to food trucks on lot next to downtown library](#)

If you purchase a product or register for an account through one of the links on our site, we may receive compensation.

Sponsor Content

Grand Rapids ‘cooler than Disney World?’ Your kids might surprise you!

Make a point of experiencing big city amenities with a family-friendly vibe on the west side of the state this year.

Experience Grand Rapids

