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discrimination lawsuit for \$750,000



Amber Reineck

The City of Howell will pay three-quarters of million dollars to settle a lawsuit filed on behalf of a women's sober living house.

The \$750,000 housing discrimination settlement was reached on behalf of the Amber Reineck House, its founder, and a local fair housing agency.

“This settlement is a victory not just for the Amber Reineck House, but for Michigan women who struggle with substance use disorder,” said Courtney Atsalakis, who launched The Amber Reineck House following her sister Amber's overdose-related death on Christmas Eve 2015. “Because of homes like ours, people have a safe, sober place to focus on their recovery without distractions. Nearly 25 women have been served since our doors opened in 2021. People who suffer from substance use disorder aren't criminals, and shouldn't be discriminated against and treated as though they are. We're glad that the lawsuit has been resolved so that we can focus on our mission: serving the community in Howell and greater Livingston County.”

The settlement stems from a 20-month moratorium imposed by the City of Howell in July of 2018 on new sober living and other group homes after neighbors opposed the Amber Reineck House. By the time it was lifted, Atsalakis was able to open the home elsewhere.

The lawsuit, Amber Reineck House vs. City of Howell, alleged that the differential treatment of housing for people with disabilities is prohibited by federal and state anti-discrimination laws, and that the City was intentionally discriminating by giving force to opposition from neighbors.

“Unfortunately, discrimination against people in group homes, particularly those with disabilities or struggling with substance use disorder, is painfully common,” said Pam Kisch, of the Fair Housing Center for Southeast & Mid Michigan, who joined the case as a plaintiff after working with ARH during the moratorium to provide counseling and educate municipal employees in the region about legal protections for people with disabilities.

Earlier this year, the Village of Hinsdale, Illinois agreed to pay \$800,000 for housing

discrimination against a sober living facility in its neighborhood, in a [similar case](#) brought by the U.S. Department of Justice.

“This victory sends a clear message that municipal discrimination against people in recovery will have consequences,” said Lila Miller. “And after 3.5 years of litigation and the case poised for trial, those consequences are clear: Howell will pay three-quarters of a million dollars to resolve the claims against it.”

The case was filed in Detroit, in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan (case number 5:20-cv-10203) by Relman Colfax, PLLC; Dane Law, LLC; and Pitt McGehee Palmer Bonani & Rivers.

A request for comment has been made to City of Howell officials.



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