

Ann Arbor resident awarded for winning fair housing lawsuit

by Alyssa Tisch
October 22, 2025



Maheen Rashid/DAILY

Ann Arbor resident Megan Morse was honored at the Fair Housing Center's 12th Annual Fair Housing Breakfast Thursday for her victory in a first-of-its-kind lawsuit upholding an Ann Arbor housing ordinance barring discrimination based on source of income.

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Morse, the case's plaintiff, has several disabilities and relies on Social Security and Housing Choice Vouchers to pay her rent. Three years ago, when Morse first tried to move to Ann Arbor, she faced troubles when trying to rent from the Wilson White Company due to her housing vouchers, according to a press release.

“When the Ann Arbor Housing Commission granted Morse a housing voucher to pay rent in Ann Arbor, she inquired about renting at several Ann Arbor apartment communities, which are owned and managed by the Wilson White Company,” the press release read. “A Wilson White representative told both Morse and a tester from the Fair Housing Center of Southeast & Mid Michigan that the company did not accept housing choice vouchers because they required the landlord to contract with third-party vendors.”

Ann Arbor's Non-Discrimination Ordinance prohibits discrimination against tenants based on their source of income and specifically requires landlords to accept housing choice vouchers. In 2024, the Michigan legislature passed a similar statewide law banning income-based discrimination. Morse filed a lawsuit against the Wilson White Company in 2023 and was represented by the Civil Rights Litigation Initiative, an initiative at the University of Michigan that allows law students to work on important civil rights cases under faculty supervision.



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In an interview with The Daily, Law School student Alexandra Jackman, who aided Morse in the case, said the outcome of the lawsuit could benefit those not just in Washtenaw County, but across the state.

“This is the very first lawsuit, as far as we’re aware, under Ann Arbor’s Non-Discrimination Ordinance against a landlord for discrimination based on someone’s source of income,” Jackman said. “What I think is so important about this case is that it not only sends a message to landlords in Washtenaw County, but it has a statewide impact. The reason for this is that the legislature in the state of Michigan in 2024 added protections under the Michigan Civil Rights Act to protect against discrimination based on where someone’s income comes from.”

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In an interview with The Daily, Morse said she hopes the lawsuit will help others with disabilities have an easier time finding housing.

“I wanted to find housing in Ann Arbor to get closer to my daughter and to get closer to (the University) hospital where I receive treatment for my disability and my epilepsy,” Morse said. “It was just a very challenging experience. I was presented with the ability to file the lawsuit, and I chose to go forward with it because I felt it was unfair how some places do not accept housing vouchers, which I think are a great way to assist people with disabilities, such as myself, to get a place to live.”

During the trial, Wilson White’s attorneys argued the company did not have to accept Morse’s vouchers as that would require the company to enter into a contract with the state government and include additional inspections of the apartment. Wilson White Company did not respond to The Daily’s request for a comment.

In April, a Washtenaw County judge approved a settlement agreement in the case. The agreement requires the landlord company to accept HCVs, provide training to its staff on the rights of both prospective and current tenants and add language to their website clarifying the company accepts housing vouchers. A confidential monetary settlement agreement was also made between Morse and the Wilson White Company. Jackman told The Daily this case was important to send a message to other landlords who may be discriminating against applicants with HCVs.

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“The significance of this lawsuit is that it puts landlords on notice,” Jackman said. “Number one, that the law says they cannot deny someone housing merely because they use vouchers, and number two, that if they do, there are going to be consequences.”

Morse said the case could have broader significance to those receiving housing assistance.

“I’m very grateful that this was able to go forward and hopefully show other landlords that there shouldn’t be discrimination as to where your income comes from,” Morse said. “There are many people out there who do

receive assistance and such for housing, and that shouldn't put a stop to a person having a place to live.”

On Thursday, the Fair Housing Center awarded Morse the Mark Mutshkin Board of Directors Award. In the press release, Pam Kisch, Fair Housing Center director, wrote she was pleased with the outcome of this lawsuit, as HCVs are especially important in Ann Arbor, where housing prices are already high.

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“Housing choice vouchers are meant to level the playing field for low-income families,” Kisch wrote. “Ann Arbor can be a great place to live with excellent schools, job opportunities, public transportation, parks and cultural opportunities. It’s also very expensive and we shouldn’t add more barriers to living here than already exist.”

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