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ANN ARBOR

# Ann Arbor woman wins award for groundbreaking victory to uphold fair housing law

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Megan Morse and her legal team from the University of Michigan Law School's Civil Rights Litigation Initiative outside the Washtenaw County courthouse after oral arguments in her fair housing case against an Ann Arbor landlord on Dec. 20, 2024. From left, CRLI student attorney Mara Horn, Morse, CRLI student attorney Sara Shapiro and CRLI Director Mike Steinberg. (Provided by Pam Kisch) Provided by Pam Kisch



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

ANN ARBOR, MI — An Ann Arbor woman who fought and won a first-of-its-kind legal battle to uphold the city's non-discrimination ordinance is getting an award.

The Fair Housing Center of Southeast and Mid Michigan is honoring Megan Morse with its Mark Mitshkun Board of Directors Award at its [annual fundraiser breakfast Oct. 16](#) for winning the first lawsuit to enforce Ann Arbor's ordinance barring source-of-income discrimination in housing.

The Civil Rights Litigation Initiative at the University of Michigan Law School represented Morse in what it called an important case addressing a widespread housing discrimination problem.

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They [sued the Wilson White Company Inc.](#) in Washtenaw County Circuit Court in 2023, alleging the Ann Arbor landlord had a policy of illegally refusing to rent to people who use government-issued housing vouchers to pay rent.



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

Through a settlement agreement formalized via an April 16 order by Judge Tracy Van den Bergh, the landlord has agreed to abide by the city ordinance and accept housing choice vouchers as a source of income when a person applies to lease one of its Ann Arbor apartments. That requires the landlord to enter a third-party contract with the government and submit to additional property inspections, which had been a point of contention.

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The landlord also must educate its employees on the rights of tenants to use vouchers and make it clear on apartment applications it's an accepted source of income, the order states.

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The parties further agreed to a confidential, out-of-court settlement regarding damages and attorney fees.

“This groundbreaking settlement is a step toward ensuring all low-income people have equal access to Ann Arbor housing, regardless of their source of income,” Alex Jackman, a student attorney with the Civil Rights Litigation Initiative, said in a statement. “Discrimination against housing voucher holders is not only illegal, but it has consequences.”

While the case was playing out, the Michigan Legislature in December 2024 also passed a statewide law similar to the Ann Arbor ordinance, noted UM law professor Mike Steinberg, Civil Rights Litigation Initiative director.



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

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Morse, who is disabled, relies on housing choice vouchers and Social Security to pay rent. Three years ago, 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 stated, and she started apartment hunting after the Ann Arbor Housing Commission granted her a housing choice voucher.

After being turned away by Arbor Hills Apartments and Wyndham Hill Apartments — both owned and operated by Wilson White — she was approved for another apartment on the far south side of town, farther from her daughter and the hospital, according to the lawsuit. Wilson White also told a tester from the Fair Housing Center it wouldn't accept vouchers, the lawsuit stated.

Representatives for Wilson White did not respond to requests for comment.

“I was born in Ann Arbor and I love the city, but my epilepsy and other disabilities make it impossible for me to earn enough money to pay Ann Arbor rent,” Morse said in a statement. “I was heartbroken and humiliated when a landlord refused to honor my housing voucher and rejected me.”

The lawsuit wasn't just for her, it was for everyone in the community, Morse said, saying living with a disability shouldn't stop people from having a home in Ann Arbor.

[Watch a video of Morse and others discussing the case.](#)

Housing choice vouchers are meant to level the playing field for low-income families, said Pam Kisch, founding executive director of the Ypsilanti-based Fair Housing Center.

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



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

The center announced in September Kisch was retiring after over 33 years and Kristen Cuhran was taking over as executive director. Cuhran has been involved with the organization for decades, starting as a volunteer when it was known as the Fair Housing Center of Washtenaw County.

In 2005, she was invited to coordinate a short-term testing project, and in 2006, she joined the organization as investigations coordinator. Her investigative strategy led to an \$82,500 settlement in a racial discrimination lawsuit against Ivanhoe Apartments in Ann Arbor, a suit litigated with the U.S. attorney's office in Detroit, and she was promoted to associate director in 2011.

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