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In a first-of-its-kind lawsuit, landlord agreed to accept tenants with housing vouchers



ANN ARBOR – On October 16, the Fair Housing Center presented Megan Morse an award for winning the first lawsuit to enforce the Ann Arbor ordinance barring source-of-income discrimination in housing. Morse received the Mark Mitshkun Board of Directors Award at the Fair Housing Center’s Annual Breakfast.

In April, a Washtenaw County judge approved a settlement agreement in Ms. Morse’s lawsuit alleging an Ann Arbor landlord refused to rent to people who used government housing vouchers. Ms. Morse was represented by the Civil Rights Litigation Initiative at the University of Michigan Law School.

“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. I was heartbroken and humiliated when a landlord refused to honor my housing voucher and rejected me,” said Ms. Morse. “This lawsuit wasn’t just for me, it was for everyone in the community. Living with a disability shouldn’t stop people from having a home in Ann Arbor.”

Morse has several disabilities and relies on Social Security and Housing Choice Vouchers 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.

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. 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 makes it illegal to discriminate against tenants based on the source of their income and requires landlords to accept housing choice vouchers as proof of income in their tenant screening process.

Because housing choice vouchers are paid directly to landlords by the Ann Arbor Housing Commission, there is little risk of tenants failing to pay their rent.

In December 2024, the Michigan legislature passed a statewide law that is similar to the Ann Arbor ordinance. In the litigation, Wilson White argued that it did not have to accept vouchers because it did not want to enter into a contract with the government, which would require additional inspections of the apartment.

“Housing choice vouchers are meant to level the playing field for low-income families,” said Pam Kisch, Director of the Fair Housing Center. “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.”

Under the order signed by the court, Wilson White will:

- Accept Housing Choice Vouchers as a valid source of income for rental applicants,
- Provide training to its staff on the rights of prospective and current tenants who use Housing Choice Vouchers, and
- Clarify its rental applications to explicitly state its acceptance of vouchers as a source of other income.

Attorneys’ fees and damages were agreed to in an out-of-court settlement, which is confidential.

"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," said Alex Jackman, a student attorney with the Civil Rights Litigation Initiative. "Discrimination against housing voucher holders is not only illegal, but it has consequences."



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