

## Highwood landlords settle housing discrimination charge

(<http://www.pioneerlocal.com/highlandpark/news/1118536,HP-DiscrimCase-082108-s1.article>)

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Two Highwood landlords have settled a March, 2008 charge of housing discrimination brought by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for \$7,500.

### **The charge related to their refusal to rent to a single parent with a child.**

The settlement will be made with the Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs, based in Winnetka, and includes a requirement that the landlords be counseled about their responsibilities under all applicable fair housing laws and advertise their units using "Equal Housing Opportunity" language, and that they consent to monitoring by HUD.

Martin and Mary Giarelli, of Highwood, were charged with refusal to rent a unit to an eligible applicant at their five-unit owner-occupied building, 250 Highwood Avenue. They did not return a telephone call requesting their comment on the settlement.

The Interfaith Housing Center was able to identify the discriminatory practices by using trained undercover testers on multiple occasions to ask to see the apartment after a complaint was filed by an area employer whose employee had been told she could not rent there because she had a child.

### **'Very small'**

According to federal charges, Mary Giarelli told a tester the unit is "very small and only suitable for one person."

"The issue of familial status is the one area that people (in general) do not know about," said Gail Schechter, executive director of the Interfaith Housing Center.

In 2007, the Interfaith Housing Center was notified by an employer that a prospective employee looking for housing in Highwood was allegedly told she could not rent an available one-bedroom apartment because she had a child. Interfaith Center's tester with a child was told the same thing when she checked the allegation. Testers posing as a married couple were not told the apartment was too small for children.

"Discrimination against families with children remains a serious problem in the northern suburbs," said Schechter. "We hope that this settlement will put landlords on notice that discriminatory rental policies are not only hurtful to tenants, they can be costly to landlords and property managers as well."

Schechter said that although many people do not know that discrimination against couples with children is part of the Fair Housing Act prohibitions, her Center continues to receive many complaints about this issue. Familial status, which is the technical term used for this form of discrimination, and disability discrimination were added to the Fair Housing Act in 1988 during the President George H. W. Bush administration. Schechter said many times, condominiums do not want to provide reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities.

Protected classes include: race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status or disability. Illinois also protects people on the basis of age, marital status, sexual orientation, ancestry or military discharge status.

Schechter said that some people dislike using testers to identify the facts of a discrimination allegation, especially in "Mom and Pop" landlord situations. She argues, however, that the testing is done for families looking for a place to live where they should not be denied the opportunity to live, especially in an area close to employment.

**"Where is this person going to live (otherwise)?" Schechter said.**

Landlords can still check references to determine if a tenant is satisfactory, Schechter said. That is permissible. Not every tenant need be accepted. Tenants who abuse the landlord relationship and housing they have previously had should know it can affect their ability to obtain future housing.

"(Landlords) can't make discriminatory statements," Schechter said. "You just can't do it."