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## GENERAL NEWS

### DOJ Settles Sexual Harassment Suit against Oklahoma Landlords

In a [press release](#) yesterday, the Department of Justice ([DOJ](#)) announced that it has reached a \$1.25 million agreement with Oklahoma owners resolving allegations that their agent sexually harassed female tenants and prospective tenants while owning or managing residential rental properties.

According to the press release, the lawsuit alleged that the agent violated the [Fair Housing Act](#) by subjecting numerous female tenants to egregious sexual harassment for almost 20 years. Specifically, the agent was accused of demanding that prospective tenants engage in sexual acts to obtain housing, offering to reduce rent and overlooking unpaid rent in exchange for sexual acts, evicting and threatening to evict female tenants for refusing his sexual advances, engaging in unwanted sexual touching and groping, making unwelcome sexual advances and comments, and entering the homes of female tenants unannounced and without their consent to further these advances. The owners were named in the lawsuit because they owned the properties at which the discriminatory conduct took place, and are therefore vicariously liable for their agent's harassment.

Under the terms of the [consent order](#), which was approved this week by the United States District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma, the defendants will pay \$1.2 million in damages to female tenants and prospective tenants harmed by the harassment and a \$50,000 civil penalty to the United States. Likewise, the defendants must provide fair housing training for their employees, provide a complaint procedure to tenants and release judgments obtained against victims wrongfully evicted.

The Fair Housing Act prohibits harassment of tenants and other forms of housing discrimination because of race, sex, color, national origin, disability, religion, and familial status. In October 2017, the DOJ's Civil Rights Division [announced](#) the [Sexual Harassment in Housing Initiative](#). The initiative specifically seeks to increase the Department's efforts to protect individuals from harassment by landlords, property managers, maintenance workers, security guards, and other employees and representatives of rental property owners. Since launching the Initiative, the Department has filed 21 lawsuits alleging sexual harassment in housing.



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