
Property Management Company's Refusal to Rent to District Voucher Holders is Unlawful Discrimination

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This press release was prepared and disseminated in conjunction with The Equal Rights Center and the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs.

The Equal Rights Center (ERC), a civil rights organization that seeks to promote equal opportunity in housing, filed a lawsuit today against The Lenkin Company Management, Inc., a residential property management firm, and related entities for violating the DC Human Rights Act and the federal Fair Housing Act for discriminatory rental practices.

Lenkin has unlawfully refused to rent available units in properties located in the Northwest quadrant of the District—The Lencshire House, The Yorkshire, The Parkhill and The Garfield House—to recipients of Housing Choice Vouchers. Housing Choice Vouchers are subsidies designed to help low-income individuals and families obtain housing by permitting individuals to offset a portion of their rent with a voucher. Administered by local authorities as part of a larger federal program, the Housing Choice Voucher program (Program) was designed to permit low-income individuals and families to obtain housing outside of areas of concentrated poverty so as to obtain greater access to quality economic and educational opportunities. However, in the District, the majority of Voucher holders reside in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty. Lenkin's refusal to make its properties available to Voucher holders thwarts the underlying goals of the Program and is expressly prohibited by the DC Human Rights Act, which makes it illegal to discriminate based on sources of income.

Furthermore, Lenkin's practices disproportionately affect African Americans, who make up the vast majority of Voucher holders in the District. According to the data cited in the ERC complaint, Lenkin's refusal to rent to Voucher holders is 71 times more likely to exclude African american renters than white renters. As a result, Lenkin's refusal to rent to Voucher holders also violates the prohibitions on racial discrimination in the DC Human Rights Act and the federal Fair Housing Act.

The [action was filed](#) by WilmerHale and the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs. The WilmerHale legal team includes [Steven Cherry](#), [Skye Perryman](#), [Alexander White](#), [Ericka Aiken](#) and [Jennifer Jacoby](#).

Prior to filing the complaint, the ERC conducted extensive civil rights testing of multiple properties owned, managed, or operated by Lenkin in parts of the District, such as the upper Northwest quadrant, where African Americans are underrepresented. The testing revealed that the company has a policy or practice of excluding applicants seeking to use Vouchers as a source of payment to help pay for rent.

ERC Executive Director Melvina Ford comments: “Through this lawsuit the ERC hopes to make Lenkin properties available to Voucher holders in the future and to make good on the promise that housing opportunity should be equal for all renters in the District. We will continue to combat these kinds of discriminatory practices, particularly where such refusals to rent have an adverse effect on and seek to exclude African american renters who rely on Vouchers to pay for the rent.”

WLC Executive Director Jonathan Smith states: “Source of income discrimination in the District is a pernicious and persistent problem that creates unnecessary and unlawful barriers to meaningful housing choice for Voucher holders and which perpetuates racial and economic segregation. For too long, landlords have refused to rent to Voucher holders, which contravenes the Voucher Program's goals and makes our communities less integrated and less equitable.”

WilmerHale Partner Steven Cherry notes: “Laws outlawing discrimination of the kind alleged here are designed to ensure that individuals are not prevented from obtaining quality housing based on their race or receipt of housing subsidies. We hope this suit will encourage all District landlords to comply with the anti-discrimination laws.”