



October 18, 2016

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**FEDERAL DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT SETTLES:**  
*housing provider created unfair barriers for people with disabilities*

The Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council (MMFHC) has settled a federal housing discrimination complaint against the owner and managers of apartment complexes in multiple Wisconsin communities, including Franklin, Sheboygan Falls, Kenosha and Appleton. The complexes are owned by William Bodner and Bodner Property Management. Also named as respondents in MMFHC's complaint were rental agents Amber Williams, Mary Jaquish and Scott Davis. (Hereafter collectively referred to as "Bodner.") Altogether, Bodner owns and manages approximately 425 apartments. MMFHC's complaint alleged that Bodner violated the federal Fair Housing Act by failing to make reasonable accommodations for prospective tenants with disabilities who used assistance animals.

Under the terms of the settlement, Bodner will reimburse MMFHC \$1469 for the costs of the investigation that led to the complaint, pay MMFHC's attorney fees, and modify its rental policy to comply with state and federal fair housing laws concerning renting to persons with assistance animals. Further, Bodner and its agents will utilize the fair housing logo on rental materials, display fair housing posters from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in rental offices, and all Bodner staff who participate in the business's rental activities will attend fair housing training. Finally, Bodner will provide \$4000 to support the creation and distribution of a brochure about the rights of tenants to reside with their assistance animals.

MMFHC's complaint against Bodner stemmed from a testing investigation at Bodner properties conducted during 2014 and 2015. Testing is a controlled method of measuring and documenting the quality, content and quantity of information and service afforded to homeseekers by a housing provider. During the course of MMFHC's investigation, some testers were told that a prospective tenant with an assistance animal would be charged a monthly 'pet fee' of \$40. At other properties, testers were

told that dogs – the type of assistance animal in question – were not allowed at all. Although landlords may impose extra fees and deposits for ‘pets,’ they must accommodate tenants with disabilities who have assistance animals by not charging extra fees or deposits for the assistance animals. “Animals that assist people with disabilities to live independently are not pets,” notes Carla Wertheim, MMFHC’s Executive Vice President. “The law explicitly protects the right of people with disabilities to have assistance animals as a reasonable accommodation to a housing provider’s policies. Unfortunately, this form of discrimination is quite common, but it’s not well understood.”

MMFHC filed a housing discrimination complaint against Bodner with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in May 2016. The complaint was settled in August, and Bodner complied with the financial terms of the settlement last month.

Attorney Katherine L. Charlton, of Hawks Quindel, is MMFHC’s General Counsel and represented MMFHC in this complaint. MMFHC’s work was funded in part by a Fair Housing Initiatives Program grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

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MMFHC is a private, non-profit organization whose purpose is to promote fair housing throughout the State of Wisconsin by guaranteeing all people equal access to housing opportunities and by creating and maintaining racially and economically integrated housing patterns. It operates satellite offices in Dane County (the Fair Housing Center of Greater Madison) and in Northeast Wisconsin (the Fair Housing Center of Northeast Wisconsin).

Persons who feel they may have experienced illegal housing discrimination should call 1-877-647-FAIR, a toll-free number. All services to victims of illegal housing discrimination are free of charge. More information is available at [www.fairhousingwisconsin.com](http://www.fairhousingwisconsin.com).