



LaCrosse Race Discrimination Case Settles for \$57,500.00

Marcus and Brenda Young, an African American couple, have successfully settled a race discrimination complaint against Victoria Gerrard, the owner of Geneva Terrace Apartments, a 96-unit complex located on Mormon Coulee Road in LaCrosse, and Nicolai Quinn, its manager. Gerrard will pay \$47,500 in damages to the Youngs, and will pay a fine of \$10,000 to the federal government.

The Youngs' complaint stemmed from a series of interactions with Quinn that began in autumn of 2009. Between September 2009 and March 2010, the Youngs saw multiple advertisements for Geneva Terrace Apartments, both in newspapers and on signage outside the building. During that time period, they called the complex multiple times and visited once. Each time, they spoke with Quinn and asked if there were any 2- or 3-bedroom apartments available. In each instance, Quinn told the Youngs that there were none.

Concerned they were experiencing discrimination based on their race, the Youngs asked a white friend to call Geneva Terrace in March 2010 to inquire about available apartments. The white friend also spoke with Quinn, and when she asked about a 2-bedroom apartment available for May 1, he told her there was an available apartment. Brenda Young called about 15 minutes after her white friend, and also spoke with Quinn. When she asked about availability for May 1, Quinn told her that there were no available units until July or August.

The Youngs contacted the Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council (MMFHC) and filed a complaint, alleging that Quinn discriminated against them based on their race. MMFHC counseled them on their legal rights and conducted a testing investigation into their allegations. Testing is a controlled method of measuring and documenting differences in the quality, content and quantity of information and services afforded to different homeseekers by a housing provider. In MMFHC's investigation, multiple African American testers contacted Quinn and were told that there were no available apartments. White testers who spoke with Quinn were told units were in fact available.

With assistance from MMFHC, the Youngs filed complaints with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Wisconsin Equal Rights Division (ERD) in October 2010. Subsequently, both agencies found in

favor of the Youngs and issued charges of discrimination. Both HUD and ERD reviewed the testing evidence provided by MMFHC and cited it in their determinations. Following the charge of discrimination by HUD, the defendants elected to move the case to the United States District Court for final adjudication and the U.S. Department of Justice joined the case. MMFHC referred the Youngs to Attorney David Sparer of Herrick and Kasdorf, in Madison, who has many years experience with fair housing cases.

In November 2012, the Youngs reached a settlement with Quinn and Gerrard. In addition to paying \$47,500 to the Youngs and a fine of \$10,000 to the federal government, the defendants will implement a non-discrimination policy and share the policy with all current tenants and employees. They will also post "equal housing opportunity" signs at all rental offices and buildings with available units, and will include language about provision of equal housing opportunities in all advertising and on all rental agreements and applications. Every person involved in renting, managing or operating Geneva Terrace Apartments will also participate in a two-hour fair housing training session. The U.S. Department of Justice will also monitor compliance by Geneva Terrace every six months for a period of five years.

The Youngs have said they hope that now this will never happen to any one else who applies to Geneva Terrace. They also hope that given publicity, such problems will never happen to anyone else in dealing with any landlord. And, they say, "if anyone thinks it has happened to them, they should seek help by calling the Fair Housing Council."

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MMFHC is a private, non-profit organization whose purpose is to promote fair housing throughout the State of Wisconsin by combating illegal housing discrimination 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. Callers within the 414 area code may call 414-278-1240. All services to victims of illegal housing discrimination are free of charge.