

Star-Telegram

Eules apartments discriminate in renting, ex-worker says

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EULESS -- A former leasing agent at a Eules apartment complex is asking state and federal officials to investigate whether the complex committed civil-rights violations by denying apartments to potential tenants with Middle Eastern or Asian backgrounds.

Daniesha Davis, 29, filed a discrimination complaint with the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department in January. The complaint says her employers at Stonebridge at Bear Creek told her to place Middle Eastern and Asian tenants in two buildings at the complex.

When those blocks of apartments were full, Davis said, she was told to turn away Middle Easterners and Asians inquiring about apartments -- even if units in other parts of the complex were vacant.

Potential tenants with Middle Eastern- or Asian-sounding names or accents were told "no vacancies" when they called the complex at 2250 Fuller-Wiser Road, Davis said.

"I was told that no one else wanted to live by these people. That they where dirty and they cooked with curry," she told the *Star-Telegram*.

Nancy Hart, vice president of operations for the company that oversees Stonebridge, strongly denied the allegations.

"We have responded to the allegations, which are totally unfounded, and we feel quite certain our position will be vindicated," Hart said. "We enjoy all the residents that we have and they represent a wide spectrum of ethnicities."

Margarita Patterson, who works as a leasing consultant at Stonebridge, said the complex does not discriminate against anyone.

"We are built on a standard of excellence in total commitment to equal opportunity and fairness to all," Patterson said.

Ty Gomez, a Dallas employment attorney who is representing Davis, said HUD referred Davis' complaint to the Texas Workforce Commission's Civil Rights Division.

A spokeswoman for that agency said she cannot discuss or confirm complaints, but Gomez said the agency notified Davis that the case is being reviewed.

Since she filed the complaint, Davis said, her employer reassigned her, which essentially left her unemployed. The reassignment forced her to split her work hours between two complexes and to work weekends, which created child-care issues that made it impossible for her to continue to work there.

"After they learned of it, they retaliated against her," Gomez said.

Eules' affordable housing and its location near Dallas/Fort Worth Airport have attracted immigrants from many parts of the world, including Tonga, Mexico, Pakistan, Nepal and Liberia. The city's international flavor has been touted by city leaders.

But the recent discrimination claims have drawn concern from the Council on American-Islamic Relations, a national Muslim civil-rights group. The group urged HUD to take a closer look.

The council is concerned that, if Middle Eastern and Asian people are being singled out, practicing Muslims are among those being discriminated against, said Mustafaa Carroll, president of its Dallas-Fort Worth board.

He said misconceptions about the Muslim community and Islam have lingered since 9-11. He said Middle Easterners and Asians who practice Islam have seen increased discrimination in employment and housing.

Davis said the focus appeared to be on prospective tenants' nationality and culture rather than religion since Middle Eastern and Asian people were described as "curry people."

"My heart kind of sank," Davis said. "I've never heard anyone say that before."

Davis said she was placed in an uncomfortable position and struggled with the issue for months before deciding to file a complaint.

"It was kind of eating at my conscience," Davis said. "There were just so many people turned away."

Staff writer Melody McDonald contributed to this report.

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