

JUSTICE NEWS

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Jury Awards \$115,000 to Victims of Housing Discrimination

WASHINGTON— A federal jury in Detroit today returned a \$115,000 verdict against a Ypsilanti, Mich., man for sexually harassing female tenants in his capacity as a property manager, the Justice Department announced today. The jury also found the property owner and his company liable for the illegal harassment.

The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in Detroit, alleged that Glenn Johnson subjected female tenants to discrimination on the basis of sex, including severe, pervasive and unwelcome sexual harassment, in violation of the federal Fair Housing Act. The complaint also alleged that Ronnie Peterson and First Pitch Properties LLC, the owners of the properties, are liable for Johnson's discriminatory conduct.

"Civil rights laws in this country – including the Fair Housing Act – seek to ensure that all individuals may live free from discrimination and harassment," said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. "Today's jury verdict reminds landlords and rental agents that tenants should never be subjected to sexual harassment and that the Justice Department will vigorously fight to protect tenants from illegal discrimination."

Over the course of a six day trial, the United States presented evidence that Glenn Johnson subjected six women to severe and pervasive sexual harassment, ranging from unwelcome sexual comments and sexual advances, to requiring sexual favors in exchange for their tenancy. One woman testified that Johnson refused to give her keys to her apartment until she agreed to have sex with him. Another woman testified that she had sex with Johnson at least 20 times because he threatened that the owner would evict her if she did not.

The United States also presented evidence that Washtenaw County Commissioner Ronnie Peterson, who owned the properties, knew that Johnson was sexually harassing tenants but did nothing to stop it. One woman testified that she complained in person to Peterson about Johnson's conduct yet Johnson continued to handle properties for Peterson for nearly two more years.

"Today's verdict sends a message to landlords and rental agents that they cannot abuse their positions and sexually harass tenants," said U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan Barbara L. McQuade. "Women should be safe from sexual harassment in their own homes."

Compensatory and punitive damages in the amount of \$115,000 will be divided among the six female tenants whom the jury found were victims of the harassment. The United States will file a post-trial motion seeking civil penalties against the three defendants as well as comprehensive injunctive relief. This case was referred to the Department of Justice by the Fair Housing Center of Southeastern Michigan.

Fighting illegal discrimination in housing is a top priority of the Justice Department. The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex familial status, national origin and disability. More information about the Civil Rights Division and the laws it enforces is available at www.usdoj.gov/crt. Individuals who believe that they have been victims of housing discrimination or have information related to this lawsuit can call the Housing Discrimination Tip Line at 1-800-896-7743, e-mail the Justice Department at fairhousing@usdoj.gov or contact the Department of Housing and Urban Development at 1-800-669-9777.

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Civil Rights Division