



Landlord ordered to pay almost \$50,000 in race discrimination case

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By

ARAB, Alabama -- A landlord in Arab has been ordered to pay nearly \$50,000 after the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ruled he discriminated against a family he was renting to because he was upset one of the occupants was in an interracial relationship, HUD announced today.

In an interview, landlord Phillip Maze, 60, said he wanted the residents out because seven people were living there when he only agreed to allow four and because he was worried about possible drug activity in the mobile home.

The **case began in March 2009** when Maze, who is white, allowed sisters Amanda and Melissa Garrett and Amanda's fiancée Christopher Doss and her infant child -- all of whom are white -- to move into a mobile home owned by Maze's mother, Opal Maze, according to an order filed by a HUD administrative law judge.

After agreeing to let the four stay, Maze said the Garretts told him they needed to move in two young children who were related to them after the children's parents were busted with a meth lab. Maze said he allowed the two children to move in, too.

Not long after they moved in, Melissa Garrett brought Jamaal King, a black Trussville resident who is a medical student, to stay there during spring break, according to the HUD filing.

The filing goes on to say Maze told Melissa Garrett that "he did not like interracial relationships and wanted her to move out" but because she was caring for the two additional children he agreed to let her stay as long as King left.

Maze, however, said today King stayed longer than they had agreed upon and he turned off the water for two hours until King left. HUD records state King stayed there from March 8, 2009 until March 11, 2009.

"What awful, horrible thing did I do? I made him go home," Maze said.

Melissa Garrett, according to the HUD filing, experienced a panic attack as she drove back from dropping off King in Trussville because she was worried Maze wouldn't allow her bi-racial children to visit the home.

Maze said his actions weren't based on his views on race, but because he felt there were too many people in the mobile home.

"I have employed blacks and I don't use the N-word but maybe once a year and then it's a joke or as a reference," Maze said. "Just because you use that word, doesn't make you a racist, bigoted hate monger."

The six soon moved out of the mobile home and in December 2009, HUD charged Maze with violating the Fair Housing Act.

The complaint said Maze told a HUD investigator, "I do not have any blacks on my property and I am aware that we have a biracial president, but no federal law will make me rent to anyone I do not want to."

Maze has said he was angry because he felt the investigator was trying to intimidate him.

In May 2010, a HUD administrative law judge heard testimony from everyone involved in the City Council chambers in Arab, according to HUD records.

Maze said he was not allowed to mention his concerns of drug activity or the garbage he said was left behind after they moved.

"They just harped and harped on the fact that I allowed the white people and not the black person," Maze said.

In May of this year, HUD ruled that Maze had discriminated and ordered him to pay \$39,165 in damages to the residents, including King, and to pay the government a \$10,000 civil penalty.

"It was black against white and right now a black is top dog. Maybe it's dangerous to say that," Maze said.

Maze said the order could cause his family to lose land they've owned for 40 years. He said much of their money goes toward keeping his mother, who has Alzheimer's disease, in a nursing home.

"This has devastated our family, it's gutted me to my backbone. I can't sleep. I've contemplated suicide," Maze said.

John Trasvina, HUD assistant secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, in a 2009 press release announcing the complaint said what Maze did was "an outrage."

Maze said that made it difficult for him to get a lawyer.

"Housing providers can't deny you housing or services because they disapprove of the race of your friends or associates," Trasvina said in another press release issued today. "Doing so is unacceptable and strikes at the

core of our freedoms."

Maze said he is appealing the ruling.

HUD spokeswoman Shantae Goodloe said she couldn't confirm an appeal had been filed, but said Maze had the right to do so.

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