

Housing Advocates' Suit Claims Discrimination by Insurers

Law Tribune Staff, *The Connecticut Law Tribune*

July 23, 2014 | 0 Comments

SHARE

PRINT

REPRINTS



Gregory Kirschner

The Connecticut Fair Housing Center says at least two insurance companies are violating state laws by discriminating against landlords who rent properties to low-income tenants.

The nonprofit center has joined a federal lawsuit filed against the Ohio-based Great American Insurance Group and its subsidiary, American Empire Surplus Lines Insurance Co. The claim says the insurers denied renewals of property insurance policies — or demanded higher premiums — to landlords in Stamford and Willimantic after insurance agents determined Section 8 tenants were living in the properties.

The lawsuit states that the insurers' actions disproportionately affect minorities, who are 10 times more likely to use Section 8 housing than white renters. Court documents also suggest that the alleged insurance company practices are bad for Connecticut municipalities.

The claim identifies two of the plaintiffs as Jeffrey James Viens and Pamela Jane Viens, a married couple who work together in the real estate business. According to the lawsuit: "The Viens invest in rental properties in Willimantic. They typically purchase distressed properties, rehabilitate them, and then own and operate them as low- or middle-rent properties. In several instances, the Viens have invested in multiple properties in close proximity. By so doing, they have succeeded in stabilizing neighborhoods and providing affordable, safe, clean housing in Willimantic."

The plaintiffs allege that the insurers are in violation of the Connecticut Human Rights Act and the federal Fair Housing Act. They are asking a judge to award damages and legal fees. They also want the insurers ordered to stop charging higher prices or denying coverage to landlords with low-income tenants.

VIEW COMMENTS (0)