West Roxbury firm pays $15K in housing discrimination settlement

West Roxbury —

A West Roxbury property management company has agreed to pay $15,000 as a part of a settlement agreement in a housing discrimination case.

Charles River Realty, located at 1461 Veterans of Foreign Wars Parkway, entered into a settlement agreement with The Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston (FHCGB) in early September, in order to resolve a complaint filed by the FHCGB and the City Of Boston’s Fair Housing Commission. The two organizations filed the complaint in April 2013 alleging that the realty group posted advertisements discriminating against tenants with children younger than six years old.

“The complaint ... alleged that Charles River, through its property manager, posted advertisements for available rental units on Craigslist.org which stated that the available units were ‘not de-leded,’” according to a press release sent out by FHCGB.

The Suffolk University Law School’s Housing Discrimination Clinic and FHCGB revealed that the property manager for Charles River, Karen Coffin, “made discriminatory statements to potential tenants with children under six, in violation of federal, state and municipal fair housing laws.”

Craig Schechter, case advocate and staff attorney for FHCGB, said Charles River Realty’s discrimination first came to their attention at the end of last year when they received a referral from Suffolk University Law School Housing Discrimination Clinic. Schechter said the clinic found Charles River posting advertisements advising potential tenants with children to “think twice” before looking at units through them.

“We took the ball and did a follow-up investigation that confirmed that,” Schechter said.

Between October 2012 and February 2013, Suffolk and the FHCGB sent two sets of “paired tests” to look for units incognito.

“Of these tests, all four showed evidence of possible discrimination based on familial status and receipt of public assistance,” according to the complaint.

Coffin told one of the testers, who was applying for units with children under 6 years of age, that “it would be a waste of time” to show her one of the apartments because it had not been de-leaded, according to the complaint.
FHCGB Executive Director Robert Terrell said they brought a systemic complaint against Charles River, usually meaning the group’s actions affected several people. In addition to the $15,000 – which goes into the FHCGB’s bank account – Terrell said Charles River Realty agreed to comply with all fair housing laws and have its employees attend fair housing training.

The group also agreed to “submit all of its advertisements for available units to the FHCGB to review them for compliance with fair housing laws prior to making the advertisement available to the public.”

“We hope this sends a signal to others in the housing market to comply with fair housing (regulations),” Terrell said.

Representatives from Charles River Realty could not be immediately reached for comment.

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