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South Suburban Housing Center Settles Source of Income and Failure to Accommodate Disabled Persons Discrimination Complaints Against Joliet Apartment Complex

HOMEWOOD, IL— South Suburban Housing Center (SSHC) reached a settlement with the owners and management of Twin Oaks West Apartments, a 200-unit apartment complex in Joliet, resolving complaints of housing discrimination based on source of income and disability filed before the Illinois Department of Human Rights (IDHR). SSHC brought the complaints in 2023 after conducting a series of testing investigations into the housing provider’s practices for applicants using housing choice vouchers and tenants with disabilities requiring emotional support animals (ESAs).

The private settlement agreement (<https://bit.ly/SSHCvTwinOaks>), includes \$30,000 in monetary damages awarded to SSHC, the regional fair housing enforcement and housing counseling agency serving the south metropolitan Chicago area since 1975. In addition to the monetary damages, Twin Oaks has agreed to conform its rental management practices to comply with the federal Fair Housing Act and the Illinois Human Rights Act protections relating to rental decisions based on an applicant’s source of income and requests for disabled tenants’ reasonable accommodations to have service, support or assistance animals. Key property management and leasing staff are to undergo fair housing training and to cooperate with SSHC’s monitoring of its rental practices to review for compliance of the agreement, for a period of two years. In entering this agreement, Twin Oaks West Apartments denied the allegations contained in the complaints and did not admit that they had violated the law.

“Hopefully, the resolution of this Will County source of income-based complaint will put housing providers throughout the state on notice that fair housing agencies are monitoring compliance with this protection for families receiving government or court ordered housing support,” stated SSHC’s Executive Director, John Petruszak.

Fair housing testing on the housing provider began in April 2023 just after Illinois amended its Human Rights Act to protect against housing discrimination based on a person’s source of income including Housing Choice Vouchers (previously known as the Section 8 program). In this case, SSHC’s Fair Housing Enforcement Program conducted a series of tests, revealing that testers using vouchers

were told that Twin Oaks West did not have approved units for voucher holder payments or that they did not accept Housing Choice Vouchers as means to help pay rent. When testers inquired about renting at the complex and stated they required the use of an emotional support animal, they were given a 15-page application form which included a lease addendum informing the applicant that their “animal’s presence may negatively impact other’s opinions of and interactions with them” and were otherwise discouraged from applying for this covered accommodation.

In response to the failure to accommodate support animal complaint allegations, SSHC’s Fair Housing Test Coordinator, Kaitlyn Greenholt observed, “By requiring individuals to complete a 15-page long application, the complex was making the reasonable accommodation process a burden on their tenants and applicants with disabilities to discourage them from living with the support animals that were prescribed to them.”

The settlement was reached through representation provided to SSHC by Jeffrey Taren with the Seattle and Chicago based civil rights law firm of Shishido Taren & Goldsworthy.

About South Suburban Housing Center

SSHC is the private, non-profit, regional fair housing and housing counseling agency primarily serving over 100 communities in southern Cook, Will, and Kankakee counties of Illinois since 1975. SSHC’s mission is the promotion and fostering of long-term diversity by working to eliminate all forms of discrimination and exploitation in the housing markets. SSHC’s Fair Housing Enforcement Services extend to Grundy and Iroquois Counties in Illinois, Lake County, Indiana, and several central Illinois cities. Find out more at <https://southsuburbanhousingcenter.org>.

