

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 12, 2008.

For Further Information Contact:

Pam Bean, MFH
(406) 782-2573

Ryan Shaffer, Attorney at Law
(406) 207-5423
For Plaintiff Wendy McGill

In May of 2006, Wendy McGill contacted Montana Fair Housing alleging discrimination on the basis of her familial status. From an ad placed in the local newspaper, she had contacted Joan Bedford of Big Fork, Montana, to inquire about the availability of, and application process for, a two bedroom apartment owned by Joan and Don Bedford. Upon learning that Ms. McGill had a teenage daughter, Joan Bedford allegedly encouraged Ms. McGill to review the classifieds in the local newspaper that was coming out the following day.

Montana Fair Housing, following Ms. McGill's call, conducted a series of tests that supported Ms. McGill's allegations of discrimination in housing, concluding that Bedfords steered families with teenage children to other housing opportunities, violating federal fair housing laws. Montana Fair Housing, on June 1, 2006, filed administrative complaints with HUD (The Department of Housing & Urban Development) alleging illegal housing discrimination on the basis of familial status. Complaints were filed on behalf of Montana Fair Housing and Ms. McGill.

HUD completed an investigation and found "reasonable cause to believe that Respondents have subjected Complainant Clement [McGill] and her daughter to discriminatory housing practices in violation" of federal fair housing laws. On June 11, 2007, the United States of America filed a complaint, in US District Court, on behalf of McGill and Montana Fair Housing. McGill and Montana Fair Housing joined in the lawsuit, adding claims that the Bedfords violated state fair housing laws as well. In July 2008, a consent order was agreed to by all parties, and signed by Judge Malloy of the Missoula Division.

The order awarded \$33,000 to McGill and Montana Fair Housing, and further requires the Bedfords to participate in training and to develop non-discrimination policies and procedures. The order is in effect for a period of three years, during which time Defendants must report to the Department of Justice and to the McGill and Montana Fair Housing about housing practices at the subject property. Defendants do not admit to violating fair housing laws, but agreed to all of the terms of the consent order.

"While I wish the Defendants would have settled this matter two years ago, it is a relief to have the matter finally closed. I appreciate Montana Fair Housing's commitment to this case, and efforts to ensure that the Bedfords do not discriminate against families with children in the future," offers Ms. McGill. "We can all finally move on."

According to Pam Bean, director for Montana Fair Housing, "housing discrimination against families with children is not unusual in our state, so it's critical for families like Wendy McGill and her daughter to take steps to combat discrimination when it happens. Montana Fair Housing thanks them for their efforts in this case, and is committed to assisting families and others who face discrimination in their efforts to find safe and affordable housing that is available on an equal opportunity basis."

For more information about discrimination in housing, please contact Montana Fair Housing at 800-929-2611 or 406-782-2573. You can also visit Montana Fair Housing's website at www.montanafairhousing.org for a copy of the Consent Decree.