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UNITED STATES SUES CHICAGO AREA LANDLORD FOR ALLEGEDLY REFUSING TO RENT TO AFRICAN AMERICANS

CHICAGO — The United States filed a civil lawsuit today against Terence Flanagan, a Chicago area property owner and rental agent, alleging that he refused to rent properties he owned or controlled to African-Americans, in violation of the federal Fair Housing Act, the United States Attorney's Office and the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division announced. The government is seeking a court order prohibiting future discrimination by the defendant, unspecified monetary damages for those harmed by the defendant's conduct, and a civil penalty.

The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court, alleges that this past July Flanagan refused to rent a single-family house he owns at 14412 South Highland, in south suburban Orland Park, to Kamal Alex Majeid, who is African-American, because of his race. The lawsuit also alleges that Flanagan asked a white tester employed by the Justice Department whether her husband was African-American and admitted to her that he did not want to rent to African-Americans. The suit further alleges that Flanagan told this tester that he had numerous other rental properties in the Chicago area.

Testers are individuals who pose as applicants for housing and report on their interactions with housing providers to determine their compliance with fair housing laws. Since 1991, the Justice Department has operated a Fair Housing Testing Program in which it uses federal employees or contractors as testers to identify alleged violations of the Fair Housing Act.

“We are committed to seeking out discrimination and acting forcefully to eliminate it in all its forms from the Chicago-area housing market,” said Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois.

“Racial discrimination has no place in this nation, particularly when it stands in the way of an individual satisfying a basic need like housing,” said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General of the Civil Rights Division. “This lawsuit makes clear that such discrimination will not be tolerated, and we will use all tools at our disposal to root out unlawful discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities.”

The lawsuit resulted from a complaint by the South Suburban Housing Center, a private suburban Chicago fair housing organization, after it was contacted by Majeid, who filed a private federal lawsuit against Flanagan in August.

The government is being represented by attorneys from the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division in Washington, together with Assistant U.S. Attorneys Joan Laser and Patrick Johnson in Chicago.

In civil cases, the government has the burden of proving the allegations by a preponderance of the evidence.

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