

October 24, 2018

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Rachel Wentworth, Executive Director  
Housing Equality Center of Pennsylvania  
[wentworth@equalhousing.org](mailto:wentworth@equalhousing.org)  
(267) 419-8918 x5

## **Bucks County Apartment Complex Pays \$25,000 for Failure to Allow Emotional Support Animals**

**Fort Washington, PA** -The Housing Equality Center of Pennsylvania (“HECP”) and a Bucks County resident entered into a conciliation agreement resolving federal housing discrimination complaints against Dublin Village Apartments for violating the disability portion of the federal Fair Housing Act.

In April of 2017, HECP was contacted when a single mom with children learned that her lease at Dublin Village would not be renewed. She was never late with her rent and believed the non-renewal was in retaliation for asserting her rights to have an emotional support dog for her disability.

Soon after signing a one-year lease at an apartment complex, the complainant submitted a reasonable accommodation request to obtain an emotional support dog for her disability. She submitted documentation from a medical professional to verify her disability and need for the animal.

Shortly after, the complainant received a letter from the apartment complex stating that she was in violation of her lease agreement for having a dog. She was also notified that she would have to pay a pet deposit and pet fee. The complainant responded by providing the manager with written information regarding emotional support dogs and reasonable accommodations and also visited the management office and asserted that her dog was exempt from the fees since it was an emotional support animal. The complainant alleged that the property manager insisted she was wrong regarding her right to a reasonable accommodation.

Toward the end of the one-year lease term, the complainant received notice that her lease was not being renewed. She appealed to the management office to allow her to continue renting, but they would not agree to do so.

HECP conducted an investigation of the complex, documenting that Dublin Village imposed restrictions on emotional support animals that violated the Fair Housing Act. Dublin Village staff told fair housing testers on three separate

occasions that assistance animals would be permitted only in the one building that permitted dogs and only if a pet deposit and monthly pet fee were paid. HECP assisted the complainant with filing a complaint with the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity.

Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, known as the Fair Housing Act, makes it unlawful to discriminate in connection to any housing related transactions, based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, or familial status. Housing providers are obligated under this law to permit reasonable accommodations, or changes in policies or practices, when necessary for residents with disabilities to use and enjoy their dwelling. While it is permitted to restrict pets from rental properties, it is not lawful to deny a person with a disability the right to possess an assistance animal, as long as the animal serves a direct disability related need. A housing provider is permitted to request verification in cases where the requester has a disability that is not obvious or the disability-related need for the assistance animal is not apparent. Disability has been protected under the Fair Housing Act since 1988.

"Housing providers need to understand that assistance animals, including emotional support animals, are not pets and provide many people with disabilities essential support in performing day to day activities. Denying a person with a disability the right to have an assistance animal when requested as a reasonable accommodation, charging extra fees for an assistance animal, or evicting a person with a disability because he or she requests an assistance animal are all actions that violate the Fair Housing Act." said Rachel Wentworth, Executive Director of HECP.

The complainant said of her family's experience, "Emotional support animals help so many people like myself and my children who have disabilities such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, and autism. Many of us who have physical and mental health illnesses already struggle with feeling helpless against the judgmental society we live in. Everyone deserves to live a fulfilling life, not to be discriminated against because of their differences or denied their rights to lawful and necessary accommodations."

Dublin Village admitted no wrongdoing, but signed an agreement that will result in payment of \$25,000 to the former resident and to HECP to cover a portion of the costs incurred to bring about the agreement. Additionally, Dublin Village has agreed to participate in a comprehensive fair housing training and to revise their policies to comply with the Fair Housing Act.

The Housing Equality Center of Pennsylvania has worked since 1956 to eliminate housing discrimination through education, advocacy, and enforcement of fair housing laws. HECP's work serves a population of over 4.65 million in the seven-county Philadelphia and Lehigh Valley regions. As the nation's oldest fair housing agency, HECP's successes include eradicating discrimination at over 47,000 units

of housing, opening these units to members of the protected classes. HECP's investigations are funded by the Fair Housing Initiatives Program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Anyone suspecting that they were denied housing for discriminatory reasons, or any housing provider who wants information on how they can operate their business in compliance with the Fair Housing Act should contact HECP at 267-419-8918 or visit [www.equalhousing.org](http://www.equalhousing.org)