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Justice Department Alleges That Chicopee, Massachusetts, Housing Authority and its Executive Director Discriminated Against Tenants on the Basis of Race, National Origin and Disability

The Justice Department's Civil Rights Division and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts announced today that they have filed an amended complaint alleging that the Chicopee Housing Authority and its Executive Director, Monica Blazic, violated federal law by discriminating against residents based on race, national origin and disability. These allegations, which are significantly broader than those in the original complaint, include claims under the Fair Housing Act (FHA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act. The original complaint, filed in April, alleged that the defendants had discriminated against one tenant because of her disability.

The amended complaint alleges that, since at least 2013, Blazic has made discriminatory statements to and about Black and Hispanic tenants, including using racial slurs to describe current and potential residents, indicating a preference against having Black and Hispanic residents and demanding that Spanish-speaking residents speak English. According to the department's amended complaint, Blazic's statements have intimidated and threatened Black and Hispanic tenants. The department also alleges that residents with disabilities who requested reasonable accommodations, such as transfers to first-floor or elevator-accessible units, have waited for years, even though the Housing Authority could have accommodated them.

"It is simply inexcusable for the head of a public housing authority to repeatedly use racial slurs and make other bigoted statements about Black and Hispanic residents, or for the housing authority to repeatedly violate the rights of residents with disabilities," said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "The Department of Justice will vigorously pursue housing providers who use brazenly unlawful and discriminatory conduct to threaten and intimidate tenants. All people deserve access to housing free from discrimination."

"Bigotry has no place in public housing," Acting U.S. Attorney Nathaniel R. Mendell of the District of Massachusetts. "We expect our public officials to operate with common decency and respect, not with bias and prejudice. That someone could operate in such an important public position and engaged in this conduct going on for so long, is disturbing."


"Racial discrimination and discrimination against persons living with disabilities have absolutely no place in our country's housing market, and those who discriminate must be held accountable," said Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Demetria McCain of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s Office for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity. "HUD applauds the Justice Department for taking today's action and will continue supporting its efforts to hold housing providers accountable when they fail to meet their obligations under the nation's housing laws."

The matter was originally investigated by HUD, which issued a charge of discrimination against the Housing Authority and Blazic after finding that they violated the FHA by failing to allow a tenant to transfer to a first-floor or elevator-accessible unit to accommodate her disability. After the department filed the lawsuit, HUD made a second referral under the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act after finding that this was not an isolated incident, but rather, the result of a systemic practice of discrimination based on disability. For example, the amended complaint alleges that the tenant applied for a

transfer based on her disability in 2017, and since that time the Housing Authority offered 10 vacant apartments – any one of which could have accommodated the tenant – to other individuals.

The lawsuit seeks an order requiring the defendants to cease discrimination against any tenant based on race, national origin or disability, pay damages to individuals who were harmed by the defendants' discriminatory conduct, pay civil penalties to the government to vindicate the public interest and modify policies and procedures, including those for responding to requests by residents to accommodate their disabilities.

Individuals who have information about this case can contact the U.S. Attorney's Office by calling 1-617-275-756 or by emailing USAMA.CivilRights@usdoj.gov.

The Justice Department's Civil Rights Division enforces the FHA, which prohibits discrimination in housing based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability and familial status, and the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act, which prohibit discrimination because of disability. More information about the Civil Rights Division and the laws it enforces is available at <http://www.justice.gov/crt>. Individuals wishing to report discrimination in housing may call the Justice Department's Housing Discrimination Tip Line at 1-833-591-0291 or [submit a report online](#) .

The Civil Rights Unit of the U.S. Attorney's Office was established in 2015 with the mission of enhancing federal civil rights enforcement. For more information on the Office's civil rights efforts, visit www.justice.gov/usao-ma/civil-rights.

Attachment(s):

[Download Amended Complaint.pdf](#)

Topic(s):

Civil Rights

Disability Rights

Component(s):

[Civil Rights Division](#)

[Civil Rights - Housing and Civil Enforcement Section](#)

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