



## Civil Rights Department

2218 Kausen Drive, Suite 100 | Elk Grove | CA | 95758  
800-884-1684 (voice) | 800-700-2320 (TTY) | California's Relay Service at 711  
www.calcivilrights.ca.gov | contact.center@calcivilrights.ca.gov

July 5, 2024

For Immediate Release

publicaffairs@calcivilrights.ca.gov

916-938-4113

### Civil Rights Department Files Lawsuit Against Bakersfield Property Owner Over Ban on Renters Using Housing Assistance

*Legal action seeks to prevent future discrimination and secure monetary compensation for alleged harms to unhoused family*

**SACRAMENTO** – The California Civil Rights Department (CRD) today announced filing a lawsuit against a Bakersfield property owner over an alleged discriminatory prohibition on renting to individuals using housing assistance. Under California law, landlords and housing providers cannot refuse to rent to people based on their use of housing assistance programs, such as vouchers and rental subsidies. As part of the legal action, CRD is seeking to prevent future discrimination and secure monetary compensation for the complainant, a mother of three who was relying on funds available through the Bakersfield Homeless Center's Rapid Rehousing program.

"Refusing to rent to someone because they use housing assistance isn't just wrong, it's against the law," **said CRD Director Kevin Kish**. "At the Civil Rights Department, we're committed to combatting discrimination in housing wherever it occurs. Each and every day our investigators, lawyers, mediators, and support staff use the tools at their disposal to protect the rights of all our state's residents. This lawsuit makes it clear that when people fail to comply with the law, we're prepared to take action."

The lawsuit follows an investigation launched by CRD in response to the filing of an administrative complaint with the department in 2023. According to CRD's lawsuit, the complainant — a single mother with three children — attempted to rent a two-bedroom condominium in Bakersfield but was allegedly denied because of her reliance on rental assistance through the Bakersfield Homeless Center. When the complainant called to inquire about renting the unit for herself and her children, the property owner allegedly specifically asked what her source of income was and subsequently refused to consider her application based on the response. Although the complainant attempted to explain that she had a job as a substitute aide with the Bakersfield City School District and would return to work once she found housing, the property owner allegedly refused to give the complainant an opportunity to describe the details of the program and flatly rejected her application.

In addition to CRD's investigation, fair housing testing by Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance corroborated the complainant's account of discrimination. Under state and federal law, nonprofit fair housing organizations may engage in testing — including by having testers pretend to be interested in

renting housing — to help identify and eliminate discriminatory practices. On at least three occasions, fair housing testers with the organization reached out to the same property owner to inquire about the availability of housing. In response, the property owner allegedly denied the housing testers the opportunity to move forward with their rental applications because they indicated that they received housing assistance.

As part of the lawsuit, CRD is seeking a trial by jury and court order to:

- Permanently halt all unlawful practices of alleged housing discrimination by the property owner and any business associates.
- Secure a court order requiring the defendant and any business associates to take all affirmative steps necessary to remedy the alleged misconduct.
- Award compensatory and punitive damages to the complainant.
- Declare that the defendant violated antidiscrimination protections under the California Fair Employment and Housing Act and the Unruh Act.

If you or someone you know has been the victim of housing discrimination, CRD may be able to assist you through its complaint process. General information about how to file a complaint is available [here](#). Information regarding California’s protections against discrimination in housing is available [here](#).

The lawsuit announced today is being litigated by Assistant Chief Counsel Nadia Aziz, Senior Staff Counsel Christa E. Conry, and Senior Staff Counsel Mallory Andrews.

A copy of the lawsuit is available [here](#).

###

*The California Civil Rights Department (CRD) is the state agency charged with enforcing California’s civil rights laws. CRD’s mission is to protect the people of California from unlawful discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and state-funded programs and activities, and from hate violence and human trafficking. For more information, visit [calcivilrights.ca.gov](http://calcivilrights.ca.gov).*

