



## Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc.

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**For Immediate Release**

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### **HOME Files Federal Fair Housing Lawsuit Against Richmond Landlord**

#### **Families with Children, People with Disabilities**

*"I mean being a private landlord as opposed to an apartment complex, there are things that—there are—I can subtly just disregard certain laws like that." - Teresa Vetter*

Richmond, VA — Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, (HOME) a civil rights organization with the mission to ensure equal access to housing for all people, filed a federal housing discrimination lawsuit on May 15, 2020 in the Eastern District of Virginia against Teresa Vetter, a Richmond-area landlord. HOME alleges Ms. Vetter made discriminatory statements against people with disabilities as well as families with children. She also demonstrated discriminatory intent in the terms and conditions of her rental properties.

HOME first became aware of Ms. Vetter's discriminatory actions after a complaint from a family who had wished to rent one of Ms. Vetter's units. HOME launched an investigation into the report and uncovered evidence that Ms. Vetter actively discriminates against families and people with disabilities. HOME conducts civil rights testing to uncover illegal housing discrimination that may be difficult to recognize in a single interaction with a landlord. Fair housing testing holds housing industry professionals accountable for discrimination.

Numerous times over the course of the investigation, Vetter made statements expressing disregard for families with children. For example, during an interaction with a potential applicant, Vetter stated: "there's a lot of ways, things that make a tenant good or bad that have nothing to do with whether a person is good or bad. For instance, you have no children. **Children make terrible tenants.** The law doesn't allow me to discriminate against people on account of children, but I can tell you I would rather have a Great Dane for a tenant than a three-year-old." Alex Guzman, HOME's director of fair housing, stated, "Ms. Vetter's discriminatory words and actions are not only disrespectful toward Virginia's families; they clearly violate state and federal fair housing laws."

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, HOME has seen an increase in housing complaints regarding discrimination against families with children in the commonwealth. The Fair Housing Act makes it illegal to discriminate against home seekers because they have children. It is also unlawful to set restrictive rules on children or charge a higher security deposit because children will be living in the unit.

But her discriminatory actions were not limited to families with children. Ms. Vetter also made it clear that she discriminates against people with disabilities. Vetter refused to accept Social Security Disability Income from a potential renter, despite accepting the same amount from someone gainfully employed. In another exchange with a potential renter, Vetter stated: "I get calls all the time from people who get a disability check. Not a darn thing wrong with them. Not nothing. Nothing's wrong with them, like, you know, I'll ask 'Are you in a wheelchair? Can you do stairs?' 'Oh, it's not that kind of disability.' 'What is it?' 'I'm depressed.' 'Really, well so am I, now that I know what my tax dollars are paying for.'" The fact is more than seven million or 16 percent of renter households nationwide have at least one person with a disability according to the Pew Charitable Trust - Harvard Joint Center on Housing. Heather Crislip, president and CEO of HOME, says, "Our society must ensure every person with a disability, whether the disability is visible or not, has an equal chance at affordable and accessible housing of their choice, the law requires it." A disability under the law is a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits a person's enjoyment of life activities, including housing.

On July 1, 2020, it will be illegal in Virginia to discriminate on the basis of a tenant's source of income. This includes such incomes as Social Security Disability Income (SSDI), Housing Choice Voucher (HCV), or even VA pensions.

**HOME utilizes civil rights testing to uncover unlawful housing discrimination. You can listen to audio recordings of Ms. Vetter [here](#).**

**You can read the filed federal complaint [here](#).**

**You can learn more about HOME's testing program [here](#).**

HOME is represented by the law firm Sands Anderson.

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Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc. (HOME), founded in 1971, is a statewide fair housing and HUD-approved housing counseling 501(c)(3) non-profit. HOME's mission is to ensure equal access to housing for all people. HOME's mission is to ensure equal access to housing for all people. HOME fulfills its mission to ensure equal access to housing for all people by addressing the still glaring individual instances of housing discrimination. Additionally, HOME works to tackle systemically divisive housing practices on a larger scale through fair housing enforcement and research, advocacy, and statewide policy work. HOME also takes direct action to aid first-time homebuyers and families with homes under the threat of foreclosure. At a time when unequal access to housing and credit contributes most to the United States' growing wealth gap, HOME's multi-faceted approach is a powerful catalyst toward furthering fair housing. You can learn more about HOME and all of its services at [www.HOMEofVA.org](http://www.HOMEofVA.org).