



Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc.

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HOME Settles Federal Discrimination Lawsuit Against Richmond Landlord, Teresa Vetter

Must sell rental properties and cannot be a landlord for 5 years

Must pay \$25,000

Must take mandatory fair housing training

Richmond, VA — Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, (HOME) has settled a federal housing discrimination lawsuit with Teresa Vetter, a Richmond-area landlord. HOME had alleged that Ms. Vetter made discriminatory statements against people with disabilities as well as families with children. HOME also alleged that she demonstrated discriminatory intent in the terms and conditions of her rental properties.

“I mean being a private landlord ... I can subtly just disregard certain laws like that.” - Teresa Vetter

In 2020, the complaint (*Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc. v. Teresa Louise Vetter, Civil Action No. 3:20CV347-HEH*) was filed in the United States District Court, Eastern District of Virginia.

In the settlement, Ms. Vetter agreed to sell her rental properties. She cannot be a landlord for five years. She also must pay \$25,000 to HOME to cover the costs of the investigation. Lastly, she must take mandatory fair housing training from the Virginia Fair Housing Office of the Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation.

Heather Crislip, president and CEO of HOME, stated, “This case demonstrates that landlords and housing professionals cannot discriminate based on the presence of children in the household. You can lose your license, you can lose your properties, and you can be financially responsible for the cost. There must be equal access to housing whether you have kids, a disability, or any other protected status under fair housing laws.” You can read more about all the protected classes in Virginia fair housing laws [here](#), including four new ones added in 2020.

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. In 2018, HOME launched an investigation into the report and uncovered evidence that Ms. Vetter actively discriminated 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 helps to hold 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."* At the time of the complaint was submitted, 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 internal increase in complaints regarding discrimination against families with children. Both the federal Fair Housing Act and Virginia’s Fair Housing Law offer “familial status” protections, making it unlawful to refuse to rent or offer different terms or conditions because a household has members under the age of 18.

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. Crislip 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.

You can read the filed federal complaint, settlement agreement, memorandum of understanding, and the audio recordings of Ms. Vetter [here](#).

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

HOME was represented by the law firm Sands Anderson PC.

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.