

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**HOPE Fair Housing Center, Northside Community Resources, Four Black Women File Lawsuit After Investigation Reveals Source of Income Discrimination by Fulton Grace Realty**

*Four Black women lost housing opportunities after Fulton Grace Realty imposed unlawful income and credit restrictions, denied them applications, or intentionally delayed paperwork*

CHICAGO, IL: HOPE Fair Housing Center (HOPE), Northside Community Resources (NCR), and four Housing Choice Voucher (Voucher) holders [filed a lawsuit](#) against Fulton Grace Realty for source of income discrimination against renters who use Vouchers. Plaintiffs Nancyann Adams, Shavon Ellis, Belinda Williams, and Lakendra Johnson are all Voucher holders who were searching for rental housing and interacted with Fulton Grace Realty agents. Once the women mentioned their Vouchers or included them in application materials, Fulton Grace Realty stopped communicating with them, denied them applications, or used irrelevant income and credit criteria to reject their applications. HOPE, NCR, Legal Aid Chicago, and Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights investigated and found Fulton Grace Realty agents routinely ghosted Voucher holders, misrepresented information to Voucher holders, and prevented Voucher holders from applying or outright refused to provide them an application at all. These women, HOPE, and NCR are being represented in this [lawsuit](#) by Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, Legal Aid Chicago, and Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner, LLP.

The Voucher Program helps low-income families, seniors, and individuals with disabilities afford safe and stable housing in the private rental market. The four women in this case were all looking to move to neighborhoods they felt safe in, and that provided opportunities for themselves and their families, such as accessibility features and access to quality educational opportunities.

All four women were in contact with Fulton Grace Realty agents about available apartments within their budgets and the agents blocked them from renting the apartments through irrelevant income and credit criteria, denying them applications, delaying application processes, or simply cutting off communication after disclosing they intended to rent with a Voucher.

“Source of income discrimination is illegal and a major barrier to housing stability for families who participate in the Housing Choice Voucher program,” said MacKenzie Speer, Program Counsel at Chicago Lawyers' Committee. “When housing providers refuse to work with Voucher holders, they are illegally shutting the door on qualified renters. Enforcement of fair housing laws is critical to ensuring that everyone, regardless of their source of income, has the opportunity to secure safe and stable housing.”

“It’s all too common for agencies, like Fulton Grace Realty, to use irrelevant minimum income or credit criteria to refuse to work with Voucher holders,” said Nicole Capretta, Staff Attorney at Legal Aid Chicago. “Overt discrimination against Voucher holders still happens, but the most pervasive barriers for Voucher holders are these blanket and irrelevant policies, which leasing agencies continue to apply even when the federal government and local housing authority are guaranteeing the rent payments. It’s just another excuse not to work with the Program.”

Ms. Adams lives with her ten-year old daughter and utilizes a Voucher to help afford her rent. Unfortunately, Ms. Adams had several safety, health, and housing stability concerns at her apartment, such as an attempted break-in and mice and mold in her apartment, which impacted her and her daughter’s health and comfort. Ms. Adams learned she was expecting a second child and initiated the move process with the Chicago Housing Authority with the goal of moving to a neighborhood and apartment she felt safe in and that had more resources.

“I received my moving papers two weeks before the birth of my son, so I immediately started reaching out about listings to schedule tours of apartments,” said Ms. Adams. “I toured a unit that I loved, asked the agent for an application, followed up several times, and never heard back from him. I ended up giving birth to my son while still trying to find an apartment—it was a really stressful time.”

Ms. Adams had a limited amount of time to secure an apartment and after receiving several rejections, was forced to stay in her current apartment for another year and raise her newborn son in an apartment she didn’t feel safe in.

“Our staff work every day to promote equal housing opportunity on Chicago’s North Side,” said Chris Zala, Executive Director of NCR, which is a plaintiff in the lawsuit. “When real estate agencies discriminate, it impacts NCR’s ability to help Chicagoans find safe and stable housing. One of our most pressing challenges is helping Voucher holders who want to secure safe, quality housing in the North Side, and our office has received multiple complaints about Fulton Grace Realty over the last few years. We’d like to see Fulton Grace Realty help in our work to obtain housing for tenants with Vouchers—not hinder it.”

“Given the size of Fulton Grace Realty, and its extensive listings across Northern Illinois, we investigated whether the reported refusals to work with the Voucher program were just one or two agents or a company-wide issue. HOPE’s investigation revealed clear evidence of discrimination and widespread mistreatment of Voucher holders by Fulton Grace Realty,” said Blake Mitchell, Associate Director of Enforcement at HOPE, a plaintiff in this lawsuit. “Source of income discrimination is keeping families locked out of particular communities and opportunities, undermining the purpose of the Voucher program. Everyone deserves fair access to housing, no matter their source of income.”

Source of income discrimination happens often in housing markets across Illinois and violates state law and local ordinances. Illinois amended the Illinois Human Rights Act in January 2023 to include new protections for source of income discrimination. Despite more than two years passing since these protections took effect, source of income discrimination continues to be a significant barrier to housing for Voucher holders.

“We are proud to support HOPE Fair Housing Center, Northside Community Resources, and the brave individuals challenging this unlawful discrimination,” said Jeff Wakolbinger, attorney from Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner.

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### **HOPE Fair Housing Center**

HOPE Fair Housing Center works to create greater housing opportunities for all. We want to ensure everyone has the chance to live where they choose, free from discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, familial status, or any other characteristics protected under law. HOPE accomplishes this through education, outreach, enforcement, training, and advocacy. For more information, visit [hopefair.org](http://hopefair.org) or call (630) 690-6500.

### **Northside Community Resources**

Rogers Park Community Council, d/b/a Northside Community Resources, is a 72-year-old private, non-profit service organization. NCR’s mission is to build and strengthen communities on Chicago’s North Side, which it fulfills through a diverse set of housing-centric activities and programs focused on people with low incomes, seniors, and immigrant and refugee populations. NCR offers housing counseling services, education and outreach, mediation services and other renter technical assistance. In its work ensuring equal housing opportunity, it processes and refers complaints concerning fair housing violations. For more information, visit [northsidecr.org](http://northsidecr.org), email [fairhousing@northsidecr.org](mailto:fairhousing@northsidecr.org), or call 773-338-7722 x 16.

### **Chicago Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights**

Chicago Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights is a non-partisan, non-profit group of civil rights lawyers and advocates working to secure racial equity and economic opportunity for all. We provide legal representation through partnerships with the private bar, and we collaborate with grassroots organizations and other advocacy groups to implement community-based solutions that advance civil rights. For more information, visit [www.clccrul.org](http://www.clccrul.org) or call (312) 630-9744.

### **Legal Aid Chicago**

At Legal Aid Chicago, we work together to provide high quality civil legal aid to people living in poverty and other vulnerable groups. Through advocacy, education, collaboration, and litigation we empower individuals, protect fundamental rights, strengthen communities, create opportunities, and achieve justice. In carrying out our mission, we treat everyone with compassion and respect. For more information, visit [www.legalaidchicago.org](http://www.legalaidchicago.org).

### **Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner**

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