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By **Luke Wilusz** | Get In Touch: @lukewilusz | lwilusz@suntimes.com

Breaking News - June 5, 2014 9:16 pm

Suit: Developers with federal funding violated Fair Housing Act

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A federal lawsuit filed by the National Fair Housing Alliance and two Chicago-area housing activist groups is claiming that twelve senior apartment complexes in Illinois and Iowa violated the Fair Housing Act and discriminated against people with disabilities.

The suit claims that multiple developers used Low Income Housing Tax Credits from the Illinois Housing Development Authority or the Iowa Finance Authority to build senior apartments that were not accessible to people with disabilities.

It was filed in U.S. District Court on May 1 by the NFHA, HOPE Fair Housing Center and Open Communities.

The suit names Ryan Companies US, Inc., Iceberg Development Group, LLC, and Thomas and Thomas Associates, Inc., as defendants, in addition to numerous affiliates. Iceberg Development Group owner Jim Bergman is also named as a defendant.

When the developers received federal tax credit allocations for the apartments, they signed guarantees that they would comply with the Fair Housing Act, according to a statement from the NFHA. The act makes it illegal to discriminate based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability or familial status.

The NFHA claims that apartments built or designed by the defendants lack many accessibility features required by the act. Alleged violations include insufficient space to access sinks in bathrooms and kitchens, shower stalls that are too small and steep slopes on sidewalks and other entrance routes, according to the statement.

The suit identifies apartment complexes in Glenview, Fox Lake, East Moline, Lake Zurich, Gurnee, East Dundee, Orland Park and Glendale Heights, as well as a complex in Lisle that is still in the design and construction phase. It also names three apartment complexes in Iowa, two of which are still being designed or constructed.

Ryan Companies is looking into the allegations made in the suit, Corporate Marketing Director Clare Scott said in a statement.

"We are community partners and actively involved in the neighborhoods in which we live and work," Scott said. "We do not seek to discriminate, and we're cooperating with the National Fair Housing Alliance, Inc., in order to resolve this matter."

Jim Bergman also said his company is working with the NFHA to identify and address any problems that might exist in the buildings.

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"We want to find out what they are and we want to take care of them," Bergman said.

A representative for Thomas & Thomas Associates could not immediately be reached for comment on the suit Thursday night.

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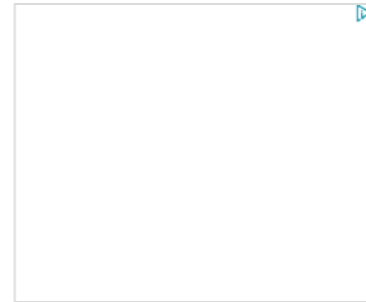
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