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## Discrimination suit filed against University Village

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DeKALB – A disabled woman who fell at least twice while living in a third-floor apartment and was repeatedly denied a handicap-accessible unit at University Village is suing the company for discrimination, court records show.

Regina Wallace, who used a cane or wheelchair because she was at risk for falling, requested a first-floor apartment when she applied to live at University Village in the summer of 2011, the lawsuit claims.

She ended up in a third-floor apartment in a building without an elevator in October 2011. First-floor apartments became available at least four times while she lived there, but managers never offered her the apartment despite her repeated requests for one, the lawsuit alleges.

Wallace and her daughter, Jerline Washington, along with the RAMP Center for Independent Living and the HOPE Fair Housing Center, filed the lawsuit Aug. 1 in federal court.

Jay Gilbert, the attorney for University Village, declined to comment on the case. Calls to University Village were not returned.

The lawsuit alleges University Village, a housing complex that receives federal funding, violated federal disability laws. Specifically, the lawsuit claims complex representatives improperly refused to allow Washington to serve as a live-in aide for her mother, first because a doctor's note didn't specify she needed around-the-clock care and later because Washington's young son also lived in the apartment.

The suit seeks a court order against future discrimination, changes in policies and procedures and unspecified damages.

"The major thing we're looking for is to get changes in the practices and policies in the way that people with disabilities are treated there," said Jennifer Soule, the attorney representing the plaintiffs.

The lawsuit also claims University Village failed to reasonably accommodate Wallace's need to pay her rent later in the month, when she receives her Social Security disability check.

"[University Village] charged [Wallace] \$30 in late fees every month," Anne Houghtaling, the executive director of HOPE Fair Housing Center, said.

Wallace lodged a complaint with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity in October, but she withdrew that complaint without a decision to pursue the lawsuit, according to court documents.

Prior to that, she sought assistance from RAMP in July 2012, and HOPE began advocating for her in October. HOPE worked with the Housing Authority of DeKalb County to obtain an accessible apartment for Wallace and Washington in Sycamore, court records show. She moved in January.

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