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Families with Children Face Housing Discrimination in Salinas

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Salinas, CA – Project Sentinel’s Fair Housing Center has filed a housing discrimination complaint with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development against a real estate and property management company that manages over 200 units in Monterey County. The complaint alleges that the company has discriminated against families with children by limiting occupancy to two people or less per bedroom at properties located in Salinas.

Project Sentinel’s investigation revealed that the management company unlawfully restricts the number of occupants per unit, regardless of the unit’s square footage, features, or whether there is space that could reasonably be used as an additional bedroom for a child. The company also enforces its policy without regard to the California Health and Safety Code, which sets the number of persons per unit based on square footage. As a result of implementing its policy, a family of six with three children and a grandparent were denied the opportunity to rent an affordable 3-bedroom home in a desirable neighborhood, and a single parent with two young children were denied a 1-bedroom unit.

“Unlawful occupancy policies are of particular concern in Salinas, where families are larger and have more children than in the rest of California,” stated Executive Director Ann Marquart. “Unreasonably restricting the number of tenants makes it difficult for families with children to find safe and affordable housing that is located near good schools and community resources.” Low to moderate income families with children face a lack of affordable housing everywhere, especially when searching for housing in Salinas with the added hardship of housing discrimination. Often these households are told to rent a larger unit they don’t need and cannot afford.

Project Sentinel recently settled a complaint against a property management company that manages over 500 units throughout the county. The settlement included $14,000 in damages, a change in policy, and fair housing education for staff. The company also limited occupancy to two persons per bedroom without consideration of unit size, layout, or the age of occupants.
In July 2014, Project Sentinel began providing fair housing services in Monterey County. Since then, 80% of the agency’s familial status investigations have produced evidence of housing discrimination. Project Sentinel has also received reports of Salinas landlords prohibiting children from playing outside at rental properties. While housing providers are entitled to impose reasonable safety rules, rules restricting children from playing on the property or making noise are a form of discrimination and can be reported to the agency.

Residents of Monterey County are encouraged to contact Project Sentinel toll-free at (888) 324-7468 for assistance with housing discrimination. All services are free and available in English and Spanish regardless of income or immigration status.

Founded in 1976, Project Sentinel is a nonprofit agency that provides a wide range of housing services to landlords, tenants, homeowners, homebuyers, and community members. Project Sentinel’s Fair Housing Center is dedicated to ending housing discrimination through education, advocacy, investigation and enforcement of the Fair Housing laws. The agency’s services span seven Northern California counties, including Monterey, Sacramento, Santa Clara, San Mateo, Stanislaus and parts of Alameda and Merced.

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