

FAIR HOUSING
JUSTICE
CENTER

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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**WOMEN FILE FAIR HOUSING LAWSUIT TO
STOP SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

Two women filed a federal lawsuit in the Southern District of New York today alleging that a Manhattan landlord and businessman asked each of them for sexual favors in return for free or discounted rent. The Fair Housing Justice Center (FHJC) of HELP USA assisted the women to obtain legal counsel and assert their rights under state and federal fair housing laws.

The complaint alleges that, earlier this year, Jennifer Dunlap met with defendant landlord Jerry Jacobs at his office in Manhattan's garment district to discuss a room he had available to rent. When they met, Ms. Dunlap alleges that Jacobs propositioned her, offering to allow her to stay in the apartment for free in exchange for sex. Ms. Dunlap refused Jacobs' overtures and did not rent a room from him. Similarly, the complaint alleges that last fall, Jacobs told tenant Kathryn Smith that he would reduce her rent by half, and allow her to use part of an apartment as a work studio, in exchange for sex. Ms. Smith refused Jacobs' proposal and moved out of her apartment.

According to the complaint, Jacobs' actions constitute illegal quid pro quo sexual harassment in violation of the federal Fair Housing Act and the New York State Human Rights Law. The lawsuit seeks a court order preventing Jacobs from harassing future tenants and rental applicants, along with compensatory and punitive damages for the plaintiffs. FHJC cooperating attorneys Kurt Rogers, Aaron Siri, and Jennifer Sperling of Latham & Watkins LLP are representing both women.

Laurence Belinsky, President and CEO of HELP USA, stated: "A crucial part of HELP USA's work involves enabling formerly homeless clients, many of whom are single female-headed households, to move to safe and decent rental housing, free from the type of harassment described in this complaint."

“While the plaintiffs in this case were not homeless, sexual harassment impacts women at all socio-economic levels,” according to Diane L. Houk, FHJC Executive Director. Ms. Houk stated that her office has received numerous complaints in recent months alleging sexual harassment involving landlords and building superintendents. Houk added, “sexual harassment is a form of housing discrimination that threatens women where they should be most safe—at home.”

The mission of the FHJC, opened in April 2005, is to challenge systemic housing discrimination, promote open and inclusive communities, and strengthen fair housing enforcement. The FHJC assists individuals who encounter illegal housing discrimination by providing counseling on fair housing rights, investigative assistance, and referrals to administrative agencies and cooperating attorneys. Individuals who encounter illegal housing discrimination should call the FHJC at (212) 400-8201.

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The Fair Housing Justice Center is a program of HELP USA.

