

FAIR HOUSING  
**JUSTICE**  
CENTER



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## **CITY EMPLOYEE CHARGES REAL ESTATE FIRM WITH RACE DISCRIMINATION IN BENSONHURST**

Ms. Frenette Lubin, a City of New York caseworker who immigrated to the United States from Haiti as a young adult, filed a federal lawsuit yesterday in the Eastern District of New York alleging that a Manhattan real estate agent at Apuzzi Realty refused to negotiate to rent her a Brooklyn apartment because of her race, color, and national origin. The Fair Housing Justice Center (FHJC) of HELP USA sent fair housing testers to the real estate company to investigate the complaint and helped Ms. Lubin obtain *pro bono* legal representation.

Earlier this year, Ms. Lubin, a Brooklyn resident, began to look for an apartment for herself and her son. She responded to an advertisement for an apartment in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. The complaint alleges that after Ms. Lubin met real estate agent Max Shalom of Apuzzi Realty at the apartment, he failed to give her an application as promised and did not return any of her phone calls. Days after the meeting, Ms. Lubin alleges that the apartment was re-advertised with a lower rent listed. The lawsuit further alleges that soon afterward, Shalom falsely represented to an African American tester sent by the Fair Housing Justice Center that the unit was not available for rent, but he subsequently showed the apartment to a white tester.

Ms. Lubin and the African American tester filed suit against Max Shalom, Steven Apuzzi LLC, and 264 Realty LLC, the owner of the 35-unit apartment building. The complaint seeks a court order prohibiting future discrimination and damages pursuant to the federal Fair Housing Act, the Civil Rights Act of 1866, the New York State Human Rights Law, and the New York City Human Rights Law. The FHJC tester is represented by Mariann Meier Wang of Emery Celli Brinckerhoff & Abady LLP.

“Today, discrimination based on race, color, and national origin can often be quite subtle and take many different forms, including misrepresenting whether an apartment is available to rent,” said Diane L. Houk, FHJC Executive Director. She added, “Testing is one of the few investigative tools that can document subtle forms of housing discrimination.”

Laurence Belinsky, President and CEO of HELP USA, an organization that assists formerly homeless families and individuals to find permanent housing, stated: “Sadly, racial discrimination in housing is still a reality. For our clients, most of whom are Black and Latino, housing discrimination prevents them from finding affordable housing and building a better life for their family.”

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 and organizations that 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.*