



Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Announcing: Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California Settles Disability Discrimination Complaint

San Rafael, CA – Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California (FHANC) settled a disability discrimination complaint against Burbank Housing Development Corporation (BHDC) and Burbank Housing Management Corporation (BHMC), who manage or own dozens of properties in Sonoma County, including Parkwood Apartments in Santa Rosa and Oak Ridge Apartments in Sonoma. The complaint settled for \$41,500 and injunctive relief. The settlement can be accessed [here](#).

“We are very pleased with the outcome of this settlement and are encouraged with the changes that Burbank is making to the way they conduct business at their properties,” said Julia Howard-Gibbon, the Supervising Attorney who represented FHANC in the complaint. “Burbank manages hundreds of units of housing, so it has an enormous impact on the community where they operate. This settlement and the fair housing training Burbank employees receive is the first step to having a sound understanding of fair housing laws and how to comply with them, and specifically how to process reasonable accommodations for tenants with disabilities so they can have an equal opportunity to use and enjoy their housing. We applaud Burbank’s willingness to work with all parties to comply with fair housing law and employ best practices.”

The complaint (which can be accessed [here](#)), which FHANC filed in June 2022 with the Department of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO) at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), alleged that Burbank and other named respondents discriminated against people with disabilities.

“For many years, our agency had been receiving calls from tenants who have complained that agents at Burbank properties make it difficult for them to access reasonable accommodations in many ways – including unreasonably delaying responses to their requests, conditioning accommodations only if they agree to unreasonable terms, requesting unnecessary documentation in order to process their requests, and unreasonably or unjustifiably denying their requests,” said Caroline Peattie, FHANC’s Executive Director. “Our staff corroborated these allegations through their own experiences while attempting to assist clients in accessing reasonable accommodations from Burbank and others named in the complaint. In addition, we conducted investigative surveys at some of the named properties and found further evidence of discrimination.”

A local non-profit helping communities eliminate housing discrimination

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MEMBER, NATIONAL FAIR HOUSING ALLIANCE

FHANC alleged uncovering evidence of discriminatory policies and/or practices at properties owned and/or managed by Burbank and the other named respondents, including:

- 1) Policies and practices requiring tenants to use their form when requesting reasonable accommodations (and refusing to process requests if tenants did not use their form);
- 2) Policies and practices requiring tenants to authorize health care providers to broadly release their medical information in order to have their reasonable accommodation requests processed (and refusing to accept alternative forms of medical verification such as a letter from a doctor);
- 3) Policies and practices requiring tenants to consider alternative accommodations, even when the tenant establishes that the requested accommodation is necessary to accommodate the tenant's disability and is not unreasonable;
- 4) Policies and practices requiring assistance dogs to conform to weight and/or breed restrictions;
- 5) Policies and practices requiring assistance animals to be on leash in common areas, even when the assistance animal is one that traditionally does not use a leash, such as a cat;
- 6) Practice of delaying and/or failing to respond to reasonable accommodation requests beyond a reasonable amount of time; and
- 7) Practice of denying reasonable accommodation requests, even when the disability and disability-related need for the requested accommodation is verified and/or known or obvious.

In 2022, after receiving complaints from tenants residing at Burbank properties, FHANC and the Sonoma County Tenants Union (SCTU) conducted in-person surveys of tenants, first at Parkwood Apartments, and then at Crossroads Apartments. Canvassers from the two agencies met with multiple tenants who reported experiencing barriers to accessing reasonable accommodations from Burbank Management.

FHANC conducted outreach to educate the community about disability discrimination, including multiple fair housing law workshops for local housing providers, which included fair housing laws related to disability discrimination and specifically reasonable accommodations.

In addition to the monetary damages, the settlement agreement included significant injunctive relief. Burbank agreed to consider reasonable accommodation requests made at any time and in any manner, even if made orally or in writing not using their designated form; to only request medical verification if the disability and/or need for the accommodation is not obvious or apparent; to process requests in a timely manner; to acknowledge that any type of animal – and any breed or size – may qualify as an assistance animal even if it has no training; to not charge a deposit or surcharge for assistance animals; to allow each tenant with a disability their own individual animal (and not require them to share an animal); to review and revise their reasonable accommodation and modification policies, letters, and forms, as necessary to comply with fair housing laws (e.g. remove requirements that an animal must be spayed or neutered); revise their denial of reasonable accommodation notices to inform tenants that they have a right to dispute the denial by filing a grievance); to instruct all employees via email that they may not recommend or otherwise suggest that an individual obtain a specific type of assistance animal; and to ensure all employees who interact with applicants or tenants attend fair housing training.

“The terms of the settlement are very encouraging,” said Ms. Peattie. “We are looking forward to working with Burbank in the future.”

If you feel you may have experienced housing discrimination, contact FHANC's office to complete an interview. Contact FHANC at fhanc@fairhousingnorcal.org or 415-457-5025 x101 or fill out an online intake at <https://www.fairhousingnorcal.org/>.

Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California (FHANC) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to ensure equal housing opportunity and to educate our communities on the value of diversity in our neighborhoods. FHANC serves several Bay Area counties and provides free counseling, enforcement, mediation, and legal or administrative referrals to persons experiencing housing discrimination. Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California also offers foreclosure prevention counseling, pre-purchase education, seminars to help housing providers fully understand fair housing law, and education programs for tenants and the community at large. Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California is a HUD-Certified Housing Counseling Agency. Please call Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California at (415) 457-5025 or TDD: (800) 735-2922 for more information. Note: This material is based on work supported by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) under FHIP PEI Grant FPEI190035. Any opinion, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of HUD.