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New decision reinforces that housing providers must maintain harassment free residences

A recent decision of the Manitoba Human Rights Adjudication Panel recognizes the right of tenants to live in a harassment-free environment.

The case involves Brandi Richardson, a young mother who, at the time of the complaint, was pregnant and raising her daughter and younger sister. Richardson had rented an apartment with the Respondent, Kirkwall Properties. From the time she applied for the apartment and throughout her tenancy, Richardson was subjected to degrading sexist, racist and classist conduct from Kirkwall Properties' Owner Wilma Galbraith because she was a young mother in receipt of social assistance benefits and because of her association with her then partner, a young Black man. Ultimately, Richardson moved out of the apartment because of the toxic environment created by Galbraith.

In her decision, Adjudicator Epp states that "Galbraith's crude, humiliating, and demeaning insults together with name calling and taunting attempted to drive the Complainant out of the Apartment Building [and] created a poisoned tenancy...[A] person's home is their safe place, a sanctuary, and that jarring language, degrading comments, volatility all made the Complainant feel unsafe. The Complainant was vulnerable – young, a single parent, pregnant, with limited income. She was not in a position to leave..."

"*The Human Rights Code* protects Manitobans from experiencing this kind of degrading and dehumanizing treatment where they work and live," said Karen Sharma, A/Executive Director of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission. "We are pleased with the recent decision by the Manitoba Human Rights Adjudication Panel which recognizes that housing providers must provide Manitobans with a harassment free tenancy."

"No one should be mistreated - especially somewhere they are supposed to feel safe, like at home," said the Brandi Richardson, the Complainant. "All I wanted from this was for the Owner, Wilma Galbraith, to know that she cannot treat people like this, especially her tenants. I hope this decision results in an end to her awful behaviour."

To remedy the harassment experienced by Richardson, the Respondents, who did not participate in the hearing, have been ordered to pay her \$15,000.00 in damages for injury to dignity, feelings, or self-respect and special damages in the amount of \$388.00 for the costs of her move. The Respondents have also been ordered to implement anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, distribute a copy of the policy widely to all tenants and ensure all employees, including the Owner, receive training on the policy.

“The Commission hopes that the remedies ordered in this case send a strong signal to all housing providers that abusive conduct has no place in Manitoba’s rental premises,” said Sharma.

The decision *Richardson v. Kirkwall Properties and Wilma Galbraith* can be found at <http://www.manitobahumanrights.ca/>

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