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## Attorney General Martha Coakley



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MARTHA COAKLEY  
ATTORNEY GENERAL

**Contact:**

Grant Woodman  
(617) 727-2543

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### **AG Coakley Obtains \$15,000 Consent Judgment, Sues Multiple Real Estate Companies for Housing Discrimination Based on Lead Paint**

#### **Lawsuits and judgment are part of the AG's continuing investigation into discriminatory Internet advertising**

**BOSTON** – Attorney General Martha Coakley announced today that her office has obtained a consent judgment and filed two lawsuits against multiple real estate companies and their agents for allegedly violating state anti-discrimination, lead paint, and consumer protection laws by posting advertisements mentioning the lead status of rental properties and thereafter refusing to rent to families with young children.

Under Massachusetts law, it is illegal to refuse to rent or steer families away from rental properties because they have young children whose presence triggers an owner's duty to eliminate lead hazards that pose serious health risks. The judgment and lawsuits are the result of a partnership with the Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston ("Fair Housing Center") and part of an ongoing statewide investigation into reports of widespread discriminatory Internet advertising on [Craigslist.org](http://Craigslist.org).

"Compliance with our anti-discrimination laws is an important obligation," AG Coakley said. "There is no legitimate reason to mention the lead status of a property in an advertisement unless it is de-lead; otherwise it sends a message to families with children that they need not apply. Our investigation and testing conducted by the Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston confirmed that brokers who advertised the lead status of rental units were likely to discriminate against families with children who later applied for the units. We will continue to monitor Craigslist and take action against landlords and real estate professionals who violate the law."

"We applaud the Attorney General and her efforts to ensure that families with young children have equal access to housing which is free of lead paint and dust," said Davida Andelman, Director of the Lead Action Collaborative. "This is especially important in Massachusetts where a large percentage of the housing stock was built before 1978; the year lead was banned in paint. It is unfortunate today there are still discriminatory practices used by property owners and the real estate industry. Only when all parties covered by the Lead Paint Laws do their job can the framework for elimination of lead hazards succeed."

"The Fair Housing Center greatly appreciates our ongoing collaboration with Attorney General Coakley," said Tracy Brown, Executive Director of the Fair Housing Center. "It takes teamwork from all stakeholders to prevent and eliminate housing discrimination in Massachusetts."

"The Attorney General is addressing two public health issues here: eliminating lead hazards and ensuring equal housing opportunities for families with young children," said Samantha Morton, Executive Director of the Medical-Legal Partnership, Boston. "Practitioners of preventive medicine know that stable, healthy housing is essential for healthy child development. Vigorous enforcement of laws like this will help reduce the stock of housing contaminated with lead."

#### **Century 21 Access Properties**

According to the complaint and Consent Judgment filed yesterday in Suffolk Superior Court against Century 21 Access Properties, LLC ("Century 21"), located in Canton, and its agent Isabelle Scorcio, Century 21 placed an advertisement on Craigslist.org for an apartment that mentioned the lead paint status of the property. Century 21 then discriminated against testers from the Fair Housing Center posing as families with children who responded to the ad, including asking the ages of children, telling testers that it would be a problem if they had a child under the age of six, that it would cost too much money for the owner to de-lead the property, incorrectly stating that the property

could not be rented to families with small children, and ultimately refusing to show the property to a tester.

The Consent Judgment provides a broad range of relief and preventative measures to ensure future compliance with state and federal fair housing laws, including preventing Century 21 from mentioning the lead status of rental properties in future advertisements (unless it is de-leaded), requiring Century 21 to provide fair housing training to its employees, reporting all discrimination complaints to the Attorney General's Office and maintaining records of applications received. The defendants must also pay \$15,000, with a payment of \$10,000 to the Fair Housing Center and a suspended civil penalty of \$5,000 to the Commonwealth, pending compliance with the terms of the judgment. The judgment further requires the defendants to state "It is against the law of Massachusetts to refuse to rent to families with children" in future advertisements.

#### **Greater Metropolitan Real Estate & Central Real Estate**

According to the complaint filed yesterday in Suffolk Superior Court against Greater Metropolitan Real Estate, Inc. ("GMRE"), located in Malden, and its employees Dotty Ryan and Gianna Rosa, GMRE engaged in a pattern of discrimination against families with children, which included posting advertisements on Craigslist stating the lead status of properties. GMRE employees asked about the ages of children, incorrectly informed testers that it is against the law to rent to someone with a child under six years old, that de-leading would cost thousands of dollars, and that an employee does not rent apartments with lead paint to families with young children. Ultimately, GMRE refused to show the properties to testers with children while showing them freely to individuals without children, even offering to discount the rent to tester because she did not have children under six.

According to the complaint filed yesterday in Suffolk Superior Court against Central Real Estate, NQ, LLC, ("Central Real Estate"), located in Quincy, and its agent Elizabeth J. Forde, Central Real Estate posted advertisements on Craigslist.org that indicated the possible presence of lead paint. Central Real Estate employees asked about the ages of children, told testers that owners were not comfortable renting to a family with a baby, and refused to rent to them.

As an advocate for victim and consumer rights, Attorney General Coakley's office works to ensure that the civil rights and liberties of visitors and residents of the Commonwealth are preserved and protected. Under federal and state fair housing laws, it is illegal to discriminate against an individual or a family seeking housing because of a person's race, color, religion, sex, familial status (e.g. children or marital status), national origin, or handicap/disability. These laws also prohibit discrimination in advertising, public housing, and actions taken by realtors, landlords, mortgage lenders and brokers. Since taking office in January 2007, Attorney General Coakley's office has obtained judgments in 91 housing discrimination cases brought against landlords, property managers, and/or real estate companies.

This matter was handled by Assistant Attorneys General Adam Hollingsworth and Patricio Rossi of AG Coakley's Civil Rights Division, in partnership with the Fair Housing Center.

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