



State of Maryland Commission on Civil Rights

Respect...Integrity...Effective Communication

May 2, 2025

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MCCR SECURES COURT VICTORY IN SOURCE OF INCOME DISCRIMINATION CASE *Commission Reaffirms Commitment to Accountability and Housing Equity Across Maryland*

BALTIMORE, MD – The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR) has secured a significant legal victory in the fight against housing discrimination with the final order issued on **April 23, 2025**, by the **Circuit Court for Montgomery County** in *State of Maryland Commission on Civil Rights and Tonya Wood v. Cheryl Sawyers (Trustee) and Rachel Wilson*. The court found the defendants **liable for violating Maryland's fair housing law** on the basis of **source of income**, and has ordered both **monetary penalties and broad injunctive relief** to prevent future violations.

General Counsel Glendora C. Hughes said that the Office of the General Counsel brought this case after the defendants unlawfully discriminated against **Ms. Tonya Wood** by refusing her housing based solely on the source of her income. The court ordered the defendants to pay **\$6,000 in damages to Ms. Wood** and **\$4,000 in civil penalties**, in addition to requiring:

- Mandatory **fair housing training** with specific focus on source of income discrimination
- The inclusion of **non-discrimination statements** in all future rental advertisements
- Ongoing **reporting and compliance obligations** for three years
- A **permanent injunction** against discriminatory housing practices

The Assistant General Counsel Terrence J. Artis, who represented the Commission before the court, offered in reflection, "I am very pleased the Commission was able to vindicate the public interest in this case. The court made it clear this landlord or her agent is permanently prohibited from making or publishing any advertisement that indicates any preference, limitation or discrimination based on source of income including section 8, and they must attend fair housing anti-discrimination training. The Commission was successful in sending a strong message to housing providers that source of income discrimination in housing will not be condoned."

The victim and co-plaintiff in this case, Ms. Tonya Wood, stated in response to the decision, "This is a critical win for housing justice. Discrimination against Section 8 voucher holders disproportionately affects people of color, single mothers, seniors, and people with disabilities. The court's decision reaffirms that everyone deserves a fair chance at safe and stable housing." Ms. Wood was represented by attorney Omar

"Our vision is to have a State that is free from any trace of unlawful discrimination."

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V. Melehy who worked tirelessly with Assistant General Counsel to secure this victory for fair housing.

“This ruling is not just a legal victory – it is a moral one,” said Cleveland L. Horton II, Executive Director of MCCR. “When housing providers attempt to lock doors based on how someone pays, they are denying far more than shelter – they are denying dignity, equity, and opportunity. This case sends a clear message: **there will be accountability in Maryland for those who discriminate.**”

Why This Matters

While Maryland law clearly prohibits discrimination based on **lawful source of income**, including housing vouchers, disability income, and other legal benefits, such bias remains pervasive and often goes unchecked. MCCR has long warned that **SOI discrimination disproportionately harms communities of color, women, people with disabilities, and low-income families**, making it one of the most dangerous and subtle threats to housing justice in our time.

“**Source of income discrimination is modern-day redlining**,” said Horton. “It is dressed in polite excuses but fueled by the same old prejudices. As housing costs rise and economic inequality deepens, ensuring fair access to housing is not only a legal obligation – it is a moral and civic imperative.”

A Call to Action

MCCR calls on **landlords, property managers, REALTORS®, and housing professionals** across Maryland to take this ruling as a turning point. **The law will be enforced. Excuses will not be tolerated.**

But more than compliance, MCCR urges the housing industry to be **leaders in justice** – to not simply avoid discrimination, but to actively **dismantle barriers** that keep families out of stable housing.

“We must build a culture where equity is the standard, not the exception,” said Horton. “Accountability is how we honor the law. But intention is how we change lives.”