

Press Release - for immediate release

from Maida W. Genser for Citizens For Pets in Condos

December 15, 2011

Citizens for Pets in Condos has filed an administrative petition alleging that the Florida Commission on Human Relations violates the privacy rights of disabled individuals that require assistive animals. The Florida Commission on Human Relations has been designated by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to investigate complaints regarding violations of the Fair Housing Act in Florida.

According to Maida Genser, the president of Citizens for Pets in Condos, "People with mental disabilities that would be benefitted from an emotional support animal are often discouraged from obtaining an assistive animals by condominium policies that force them to reveal deeply private information regarding their mental health struggles. When people turn to the Florida Commission on Human Relations for help, disabled individuals are again faced with the demand to sign overly broad releases of their medical information or their discrimination complaints will be dismissed."

According to Marcy LaHart, a Gainesville lawyer serving as counsel for Citizens for Pets in Condos, the requirement that a person asking for a waiver of a no pet policy provide burdensome and invasive medical documentation is illegal. "In other parts of the country", according to LaHart, "HUD has charged condos with discrimination for doing exactly the same thing that the Florida Commission on Human Relations does in Florida. Access to all of a person's medical records is not needed in order to verify that he or she has a disability related need to live with an assistive animal."

The Fair Housing Act requires property managers, including condominium associations, to make modifications to no-pet policies for persons with disabilities who require assistance animals. Citizens for Pets in Condos, a south Florida based non-profit corporation, educates people about the therapeutic benefits of living with animals, and advocates for more liberal policies regarding pet ownership for all residents of condominium communities.

The petition, filed with the Division of Administrative Hearings on Wednesday, December 14, 2011, asks that three forms routinely used by the Commission on Human Relations be declared invalid. The matter must be set for hearing within 30 days.

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