**MICHIGAN CITY TO PAY $750K FOR BLOCKING OPENING OF WOMEN’S SOBER LIVING HOME, AS OPIOID CRISIS RAGES**

***Federal Housing Discrimination Settlement Obtained by Recovery House,***

***Named for Woman Who Died of Fentanyl Overdose***

Howell, MI– A women’s sober living house in Howell, Michigan, named for a woman who died of a fentanyl overdose, is among the recipients of a $750,000 settlement against the city that blocked it from opening for years. The housing discrimination settlement on behalf of Amber Reineck House, its founder, and a local fair housing agency is one of the largest obtained in this region and sends a signal to local governments who have sought to prevent these types of homes from operating in residential neighborhoods.

“This settlement is a victory not just for the Amber Reineck House, but for Michigan women who struggle with substance use disorder. Because of homes like ours, people have a safe, sober place to focus on their recovery without distractions. Nearly 25 women have been served since our doors opened in 2021. People who suffer from substance use disorder aren’t criminals, and they shouldn’t be discriminated against and treated as though they are. We’re glad that the lawsuit has been resolved so that we can focus on our mission: serving the community in Howell and greater Livingston County,” said Courtney Atsalakis, who launched The Amber Reineck House following her sister Amber’s overdose-related death on Christmas Eve 2015.

The Amber Reineck House was launched to provide sober living for women in recovery in the Livingston County region, where no resource of that kind existed. But neighbors opposed the home, and the City of Howell imposed a moratorium—an outright ban—on new sober living and other group homes, for a period of 20 months, until March 2020. After the ban was lifted, ARH was able to open at a different location, where it has become an integral part of the community.

Amber Reineck House vs. City of Howell alleged that this type of differential treatment of housing for people with disabilities is plainly prohibited by federal and state antidiscrimination laws, and that the City was intentionally discriminating by giving force to opposition from neighbors.

“Unfortunately, discrimination against people in group homes, particularly those struggling with substance use disorder or with other disabilities, is painfully common,” said Pam Kisch, of the Fair Housing Center for Southeast & Mid Michigan, who joined the case as a plaintiff after working with ARH during the moratorium to provide counseling and educate municipal employees in the region about legal protections for people with disabilities.

Earlier this year, the Village of Hinsdale, Illinois agreed to pay $800,000 for housing discrimination against a sober living facility in its neighborhood, in a [similar case](https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-settles-housing-discrimination-lawsuit-against-village-hinsdale-illinois) brought by the U.S. Department of Justice.

“This victory sends a clear message that municipal discrimination against people in recovery will have consequences,” said Lila Miller. “And after 3.5 years of litigation and the case poised for trial, those consequences are clear: Howell will pay three-quarters of a million dollars to resolve the claims against it.”

The case was filed in Detroit, in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan (case number 5:20-cv-10203) by Relman Colfax, PLLC; Dane Law, LLC; and Pitt McGehee Palmer Bonani & Rivers.

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