



Tenants Sue Nation's Largest Landlord for Unsafe and Unhealthy Conditions

****Family forced to live among cockroaches, severe mold, dampness and other unsafe and unhealthy conditions in Equity Residential rental unit, according to the lawsuit. ****

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East Palo Alto, CA – East Palo Alto tenants filed a lawsuit this week regarding unsafe and unhealthy conditions in a property owned by Equity Residential, the largest publicly-traded landlord in the United States. The complaint alleges that Equity Residential allowed the tenants' rental home to fall into such disrepair that they had no choice but to move out.

“The severity, scope, and duration of the conditions in this Equity Residential home are a particularly egregious example of the company's failure to provide tenants with a safe and healthy place to live,” said Larisa Bowman, a housing attorney at Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto, which filed the suit together with the San Francisco law firm of Greenstein & McDonald. “Both the prior landlord and Equity Residential neglected this family for years by refusing to make necessary repairs, even after they were cited for numerous problems.”

City inspectors found a cockroach infestation, severe mold and dampness, windows that were not weatherproofed or did not lock, and many other conditions that violated state and local health and safety codes, according to the complaint.

The home is part of the Woodland Park Apartments, a 1,811-unit complex between Highway 101 and Palo Alto that houses many of Silicon Valley's low-income families. After the prior owner lost the properties in foreclosure, Equity Residential purchased Woodland Park in 2011.

“We tried everything we could, but Equity Residential never took our complaints seriously,” said Gabriel Mendez, one of the plaintiffs, along with his wife Ana Rubio and his father Leonardo Mendez. “As a parent, I want to provide a healthy home for my kids. That's not what we got from Equity Residential.”

The family was forced to vacate the home in October 2013 when they could no longer put up with the uninhabitable living conditions, the stress, and the lack of security. “We didn't want to leave, but I couldn't continue to put my family at risk,” said Mr. Mendez.

The complaint also alleges that Equity Residential's failure to repair a faulty gate led to two assaults and a robbery at the property. "In August 2012, the City demanded that Equity Residential fix the gate," said Ken Greenstein, a partner at Greenstein & McDonald. "Later that same month, Leonardo Mendez was violently assaulted in the driveway and left permanently blind in one eye. The fact that the gate could not be closed securely made it easy for the assailants to enter the property."

The home is located less than three miles from Stanford University, and within five miles of large tech campuses such as Google and Facebook.

"We hope this case will compel Equity Residential to start addressing tenants' complaints about illegal and unhealthy living conditions at its properties," said Bowman.
