

Marin housing manager claims retaliation for whistleblowing

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A Marin Housing Authority manager claims she was placed on administrative leave for blowing the whistle on her boss and other officials.

Bernadette Stuart, who was the manager of the Golden Gate Village complex in Marin City, filed the statement on Oct. 15 in connection with a federal lawsuit by a group of residents. The plaintiffs allege that she and the housing authority's executive director, Lewis Jordan, let the property fall into disarray to justify a redevelopment plan.

In her filing, Stuart denied blame and leveled claims of misconduct against Jordan and two other officials: Kimberly Carroll, the deputy director, and Amy Chan, the chief financial officer.

Stuart, acting as her own lawyer, said she did not work with the housing authority at the time of the incidents alleged in the lawsuit. She said Carroll and Jordan conspired against the residents and are "personally responsible for incidents alleged in the complaint."

The redevelopment plan calls for preserving 300 residences, removing 16 others and building 156 new homes for a total of 440. The developer is Michaels Development Co. of New Jersey.

The lawsuit seeks an injunction to stop the plan and demands the county adopt the resident council's "deep green" plan, which seeks to modernize apartments without tearing them down. The suit also seeks job opportunities for residents and a community land trust to promote home ownership.

The plaintiffs also allege the county and housing authority are violating the residents' rights by ignoring hazardous conditions such as exposed electrical wires, broken windows, dusty or broken ventilation systems, rat droppings and mold. The suit also claims landscape upkeep has been neglected and trash has accumulated around the property.

Stuart alleges that Jordan failed to ensure the residents' safety and Carroll attempted to cover it up. She also alleges maltreatment of employees and unethical hiring practices.

"They conspired and went silent and provided zero contribution to finding solutions to protect the community," she said. "In fact, Kimberly Carroll recommended that everyone in 49 Cole Drive building be vacated and she can board it up, tear it down by taking a wrecking ball to it as she and Lewis planned to eventually tear it down."

Stuart also alleges that Chan caused a backlog in public housing accounting that she had to spend hours correcting. Stuart said it involved about \$160,000 in incorrect data entry on invoices.

“They have been harassing me because I was named in that lawsuit and they know I have nothing to do with it,” she said. “I’m named because that’s my position. And they should have just left it at that. But instead, they want a scapegoat.

“I think that the housing authority, you know, basically removed a manager for no good reason,” she said in an interview. “And now the housing authority doesn’t have a manager. They don’t have anyone at all Golden Gate Village.”

Stanley Goff, an attorney for the neighborhood plaintiffs, said he plans to add Carroll and Chan as defendants based on the statement by Stuart. He said Stuart is still a defendant in the lawsuit, despite blowing a whistle.

“It is going to be very helpful to our case,” Goff said. “She is an insider who knows what happened and what occurred. She is a directed eyewitness who stated her testimony, under penalty of perjury, that the Marin Housing Authority executives have engaged in conduct that has had a disparate impact on African-Americans that would constitute as racial discrimination.”

Marin County Counsel Brian Washington said the housing authority takes the allegations seriously but has no reason to believe they are true. Chan, Jordan and Carroll did not respond to questions about the allegations.

“MHA cannot comment further, but will investigate these matters,” Washington said. “These allegations do not reflect our practices, our values, or our community. We are focused on serving our residents and maintaining our various properties including Golden Gate Village.

“We will continue to advance the goals of the revitalization project to ensure current and future residents have a safe and comfortable place to call home.”

Stuart said she informed the Department of Housing and Urban Development about her allegations and requested an investigation.

Eduardo Cabrera, a department spokesperson, declined to comment, citing the ongoing litigation.