

[HUD](#) > [Press Room](#) > [Press Releases](#) > [2009](#) > [HUDNo.09-193](#)

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Shantae Goodloe
(202) 708-0685

FOR RELEASE
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HUD CHARGES ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY WITH VIOLATING THE FAIR HOUSING ACT

School barred service dog for student with epilepsy and blindness from dorm

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development today announced that it has charged Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois with housing discrimination for allegedly refusing to allow a student with epilepsy and blindness to live in a dormitory with her trained service dog.

The Fair Housing Act makes it unlawful to refuse to make reasonable accommodations in policies or practices when a person with a disability may require such an accommodation in order be afforded the equal housing opportunity others enjoy.

"Having a service animal promotes independent living for many people with disabilities," said John Trasviña, HUD's Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity. "HUD is committed to making sure colleges and universities promote supportive living environments for people living with disabilities."

HUD brought the charge on behalf of the student who obtained a service dog from a non-profit organization that trained the dog to assist the student in the event of an epileptic seizure. HUD alleges that once the student obtained the service animal, Millikin University banned the student from even entering the dormitory building with the dog, requiring the student to vacate her room if she wanted to keep the animal and commute to school from her parents' home. Later, the university relocated the student to an inaccessible dormitory.

The HUD charge will be heard by a United States Administrative Law Judge unless any party to the charge elects to have the case heard in federal district court. If an administrative law judge finds after a hearing that discrimination has occurred, he may award damages to the complainant for her damages as a result of the discrimination. The judge may also order injunctive relief and other equitable relief to deter further discrimination, as well as payment of attorney fees. In addition, the judge may impose civil penalties in order to vindicate the public interest. A federal district court judge may also award punitive damages to the complainant.

FHEO and its partners in the Fair Housing Assistance Program investigate approximately 10,500 housing discrimination complaints annually. People who believe they are the victims of housing discrimination should contact HUD at 1-800-669-9777 (voice), 800-927-9275 (TTY). Additional information is available at www.hud.gov/fairhousing.

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HUD is the nation's housing agency committed to sustaining homeownership; creating affordable housing opportunities for low-income Americans; and supporting the homeless, elderly, people with disabilities and people living with AIDS. The Department also promotes economic and community development and enforces the nation's fair housing laws. More information about HUD and its programs is available on the Internet at www.hud.gov and espanol.hud.gov.

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U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street S.W., Washington, DC 20410
Telephone: (202) 708-1112 TTY: (202) 708-1455
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