

## Memphis domestic assault victim alleges eviction; says landlord blames her for incident

By Tom Bailey Jr.

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A woman claims she's being evicted from her apartment for a criminal activity far from her own doing: a domestic violence attack against her.

Mychal M. Jones has filed a federal lawsuit against her landlord at Warren Apartments, a federally subsidized rental property at 1393 Clementine, just northeast of the junction of interstates 240 and 55.

The 19-year-old mother of three says she was attacked by her former boyfriend on Oct. 15. She fled the apartment screaming for help from a security guard, who gave chase.

The lawsuit says she was "brutally attacked," but no police report was filed.

According to her lawsuit, Jones received a notice from the apartment manager, Van Rooy Properties, seven days later.

It stated: "The following lease violations has been documented in your file and gives us the right to proceed with termination of occupancy: On 10/15/2011, you had a domestic dispute at your apartment your guest (boyfriend) assaulted you and when our security officer made the scene he assaulted her as well. Please know this behavior will not be tolerated. Ms. Jones you were told at move that you are responsible for your guest and your guest activities. We have zero tolerance this criminal act. This offense is a violation of Vanrooy's selection criteria and retention policy along with a violation of the lease."

Jones is represented by attorneys Sapna V. Raj, managing attorney of the Memphis Fair Housing Center of Memphis Area Legal Services, and Keith L. Dobbs.

The suit names as defendants the property owner, GMF-Warren/Tulane LLC, property manager Van Rooy Properties and Phyllis Savage, a Van Rooy agent.

"Defendants' conduct shows an intent to discriminate against Ms. Jones based on gender stereotypes about women who are victims of domestic violence," the suit says. "These gender stereotypes hold battered women accountable for the acts of abusers and attribute to a battered woman responsibility for the actions of those who abuse her."

The eviction proceedings violate the 2005 Violence Against Women Act and the Fair Housing Act, the suit alleges.

The defendants have not yet answered the allegations in court, but attorney Christopher Lamberson of Glankler Brown, the general outside counsel for GMF entities, told The Commercial Appeal that his client has contacted its property management company and the plaintiff's attorney to "understand the situation."

Lamberson said it's his and his clients' understanding that Jones has not been evicted; she still lives in the apartment.

"My client disputes the premise of and certain facts alleged in the lawsuit and we are confident that this will be resolved shortly," he said.

The 248-unit Warren Apartments was one of three low-income apartment complexes purchased last summer by the faith-based Global Ministries Fellowship.

Rev. Richard Hamlet, missions pastor for Ridgeway Baptist Church, founded GMF, which owns 3,700 units in 17 apartment communities in Tennessee, Louisiana, Indiana and Florida. More than 1,200 of them are in Memphis.

Hamlet has said the fellowship has two goals in buying and running the apartments: serving the social and -- on a voluntary basis -- spiritual needs of residents; and using money generated by the apartments to support GMF's ministry projects in dozens of countries around the world.

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