



MARYLAND LEGAL AID

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Maryland Legal Aid Wins Summary Judgment, and Sanctions in Unlicensed Property Lawsuit in Somerset County

Somerset County, Md. (March 26, 2024) – Maryland Legal Aid announces a significant legal victory: the Circuit Court here has granted summary judgment and sanctions against Mt Vernon Group, LLC (MVG) and Eric Sessoms in a lawsuit concerning unlicensed property rental activities.

Housing inspectors found the properties in question, then being rented by our clients Jessica Truitt and Carol Vance, to have numerous safety and code violations, rendering them ineligible for rental licensing. The Court found MVG and/or Mr. Sessoms responsible for violating four out of the five counts outlined in Ms. Truitt and Ms. Vance's Complaint.

Specifically:

1. MVG charged both Ms. Truitt and Ms. Vance an illegal security deposit.
2. MVG did not give a lawful receipt for the security deposit, which must be included in the lease and inform the tenants of certain rights they have.
3. MVG violated the Maryland Consumer Protection Act by engaging in unfair and deceptive trade practices. The Court also found Mr. Sessoms personally liable for these acts.
4. MVG violated the Maryland Consumer Debt Collection Act by filing failure-to-pay-rent actions against Ms. Truitt and Ms. Vance, in an attempt to collect a debt knowing that no debt existed. The Court also found Mr. Sessoms responsible for his involvement in these violations.

The Court also sanctioned the defendants for violating their obligations to turn over evidence.

This outcome underscores Maryland Legal Aid's commitment to renters' rights and ensuring the safety and well-being of tenants across Maryland. By holding accountable those who disregard licensing regulations and neglect property standards, Maryland Legal Aid continues to advocate for fair and lawful housing practices.

Going forward, a two-day jury trial is scheduled to begin on May 9, 2024. The jury will get to decide how much to award Ms. Truitt and Ms. Vance for MVG and Mr. Sessoms' violations.

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About Maryland Legal Aid

Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) is a statewide private, nonprofit law firm that provides free, civil legal services to low-income and vulnerable people to address their most fundamental legal problems. From its 12 offices around the state and through its many community-based clinics, we help our clients preserve and access safe and affordable housing, maintain custody of their children, and be safe from domestic violence. MLA increases our clients' economic security by defending against consumer debt, including foreclosures and tax sales, removing barriers to employment, and accessing critical income supports such as unemployment, food stamps and other vital public benefits. Through special projects, we represent seniors, nursing home residents, children in alleged abuse and neglect cases, migrant farmworkers, and those in mental health institutions. In its advocacy, MLA seeks systemic change through impact litigation, policy advocacy, and storytelling.

