

HOWARD UNIVERSITY

School of Law
Clinical Law Center

January 22, 2015
Case Number Z.C. 13-08
Congress Heights Development

My name is Briana Tyson and I am a student attorney in the Howard University School of Law Fair Housing Clinic. Through the Fair Housing Clinic, I have worked with a number of tenants at Sanford Capital LLC's buildings on Alabama Avenue. My testimony relates to the frequently-occurring and severe Housing Code violations at Sanford Capital's properties, and Sanford Capital's inaction in response to tenant requests to correct such violations, even when they relate to the health and safety of their tenants.

For months, the tenants in the Alabama Avenue buildings made Sanford Capital aware of housing code violations in their units and in the common areas of the buildings. These violations included, but were not limited to

- Severe flooding in the basement,
- Infestations of flies and gnats throughout the common areas and in the units,
- Mold, resulting from the prolonged and severe flooding,
- Frequent failures of the heating system, related to the flooding in the broiler room,
- Rodent and roach infestations,
- Missing fire extinguishers,
- Exposed and unsafe lighting fixtures, and
- Severe security issues, including a lack of exterior lighting and broken locks on doors

While Sanford Capital occasionally fixed minor violations, the company refused to remedy the most severe violations, including all that are listed above, and which are depicted, in part, in the attached photographs.

Because Sanford Capital was not responsive to the tenants' requests to remedy the severe housing code violations, the tenants eventually engaged two law school clinics. The Columbus School of Law at Catholic University and Howard University School of Law. On behalf of the represented tenants, the law clinics sent Sanford Capital a letter on October 17, 2014, which listed the numerous housing code violations. Sanford Capital did not respond to the letter, and did not fix the housing code violations listed. The owners simply let the conditions deteriorate, perhaps with the hope that the tenants would be forced to leave.



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ZONING COMMISSION
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CASE NO.13-08
EXHIBIT NO.44

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Because Sanford Capital was nonresponsive to our letter, the legal clinic filed numerous law suits on behalf of tenants in November of 2014. The court ordered a DCRA housing inspector to visit the premises, and the housing inspector found 44 violations in the three buildings she inspected.

Sanford Capital did not remedy the severe housing code violations when the tenants made requests. Sanford Capital did not remedy the severe housing code violations when student attorneys reiterated the requests made by the tenants via a formal letter. Instead, Sanford Capital only addressed the severe housing code violations when required to do so by a court.

We are glad that Sanford Capital has now – after being required by a court – remedied the many housing code violations. That said, even though I am a law student, I do not think that it should take a law suit to get a landowner to abide by the clear requirements of the D C Housing Code.



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