

Scott Walker
Governor



COUNCIL FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING
1 WEST WILSON STREET
ROOM 558
PO BOX 7851
MADISON WI 53707-7851

State of Wisconsin

April 22, 2013

Secretary Shaun Donovan
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street S.W.,
Washington, DC 20410

Subject: An Open Letter on Discriminatory ruling against Apache ASL Trails

Dear Secretary Shaun Donovan,

Wisconsin Council of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing are respectfully requesting that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development should reverse its discriminatory ruling on Apache ASL Trails. It is appalling to hear the United States government declare that deaf people cannot live together. The Apache ASL Trails housing is the first and only sign language friendly environment for deaf/hard of hearing/deaf-blind senior citizens in the whole state of Arizona. This housing is unique in that it is designed to meet the linguistic and communication needs of Deaf community. Apache ASL Trails is a place where staff is able to sign and able to communicate with American Sign Language users.

Unfortunately, 99% of senior citizen housings/centers in Arizona are unable to accommodate senior citizens who use ASL. Effective communication for ASL users does not include reading lips or writing back and forth. Communication between ASL users and non-users is superficial at best. When there is no effective communication, Deaf senior citizens are seriously deprived of efficient services necessary to their well-being and health. Many Deaf senior citizens report severe isolation and loneliness when they are "integrated" into senior citizen centers/housing. Studies on the effects of isolation on senior citizens, regardless of hearing ability, have repeatedly shown a significant negative impact on overall physical and mental health.

Arizona Deaf Senior Citizens Coalition, a nonprofit organization with a membership composed of deaf seniors, has sought to build housing for the benefit of deaf, deaf/blind, and hard of hearing persons for over twenty years. Their vision came true when they collaborated with Cardinal Capital Management, Inc. to build a 75 unit low income tax credit property. The Apache ASL Trails is a building that fully accommodate all deaf individuals by providing many visual aids throughout the building and rooms, for example: videophone in every units and offices; visual signalers for smoke detectors and emergency signals; specialized lighting design that minimize glare in order to facilitate communication in American Sign Language; loop amplification system for tenants with hearing aids; and Accessibility features for residents with mobility impairments and physical disabilities. We would like to kindly refer you to <http://www.apacheasltrails.com> for further information. Specifically, we would like to direct you to HUD Brief 3-23-12.pdf on the front of the website, as the brief would address all specific regulations, HUD rulings, and legal and policy concerns.

The western regional office of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has wrongly labeled this as "segregated" housing and incorrectly declared that this is an act of discrimination. Apache ASL Trails has been instructed that it now must change its admission

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policy to accommodate a ratio of 75% normal, hearing non-signers and 25% deaf/hard-of-hearing/deaf-blind/deaf-with-disabilities or otherwise its HUD funding will be terminated. One deaf resident's Section 8 voucher was denied and was told by HUD local office to move out. This ruling is woefully perilous to the well-being of the Deaf senior citizens involved. It defeats the whole purpose of meeting those unique individuals' special needs. Now many of those residents fear eviction and has put any future deaf senior citizen housing projects at risk. Water Tower View Senior Apartment, a successful housing project for deaf senior citizens in Wisconsin, is now at risk.

This discrimination is dangerous to the physical and mental well-being of Deaf senior citizens and an outrage. We respectfully request that you to step in and help senior citizens who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, and deaf with disabilities.

Sincerely,

The representatives on the Wisconsin Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Copies of this open letter sent to following offices:

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Director Michael Trailer
Arizona Department of Housing
1110 W. Washington Street, Suite 310
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Secretary Shaun Donovan
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban
Development
451 7th Street S.W.,
Washington, DC 20410

President Chris Wagner
National Association of the Deaf
8630 Fenton Street, Suite 820
Silver Spring, MD 20910

The Honorable Janice K. Brewer
Arizona Governor
Executive Tower
1700 West Washington Street
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Apache ASL Trails,
2428 E Apache Blvd.
Tempe, AZ 85281