

# Tyranny of the bias bloodhounds

O.C. Fair Housing Council and the state shake down a Newport property owner

**G**ood intentions often lead to disastrous results. We've written in the past about sleazy attorneys who shake down private businesses by accusing them of minor violations of various consumer laws and promise to go away if the companies pay them thousands of dollars in settlement costs. It's a lot easier for many companies to pay a settlement than to fight in court, even if they did nothing wrong.

The Register's Sacramento reporter, Brian Joseph, reported Monday on another one of these unethical, albeit perfectly legal, scams done in the name of protecting the public from itself. As the front-page article explained, Dan Bader of Newport Beach advertised an apartment for rent on Craigslist. The ad said the apartment was "Well suited for professional adults," which seems like a reasonable way to advertise a pricey little unit on the back of his Newport Beach home.

Well, this innocent language brought the wrath of the Fair Housing Council of Orange County, a Santa Ana-based nonprofit organization that filed a complaint against him for "possible discrimination." Mr. Bader told the newspaper that when he went to a hearing at a state regulatory department in Los Angeles, the officials "told him the state had determined that he does not discriminate, but the ads were still a problem. He says they told him the complaint would be dropped if he paid the council \$4,000 for expenses and agreed to take five years of the council's landlord classes at an additional cost."

Mr. Bader saw the gist of this scam: A nonprofit group files a bogus complaint. Even though he made an inadvertent advertising error, he is told to pay thousands of dollars to the group that made the complaint. Worse yet, he has to pay more to attend five years of indoctrination classes. (This reminds us of C.S. Lewis' remark, "Of all tyrannies, a tyranny exercised for the

good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It may be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies.)

This "fair housing group" is funded, in part, through tax dollars. And it is given a special legal privilege that allows it to profit by filing complaints. This is legalized corruption, as the group - like those law firms detailed above - has the incentive to file as many complaints as possible.

Mr. Bader refused to play that game. As pay-back, the state is now suing him for housing discrimination and seeking "unlimited" damages on behalf of the Santa Ana housing council. Wouldn't it have made more sense simply to tell Mr. Bader what the advertising standards might be?

The ultimate problem: laws that police intentions and voluntary private transactions. Housing discrimination is noxious, but the government cannot police such things. It's up to renters and landlords to determine who they choose to rent to or from. And in this case, we're not talking even about a large apartment complex that has an illegal policy. This is about a guy renting out a small apartment in his house and saying in the ad that it would be good for "professionals." Are un-professionals being harmed here?

Ironically, for a group that so meticulously polices others' behavior, its officials have a hard time dealing respectfully with one another. Earlier this month, the Register reported the Fair Housing Council's executive officer was placed on administrative leave, but D. Elizabeth Pierson refused to acknowledge the action and even had the locks changed on the agency's office. Of course, legal action has followed.

At the very least, the housing council's employees and board members should be forced to attend five years of classes about abuses of tax dollars and government power. We volunteer to teach them.



**THE REGISTER**  
Dan Bader's ad said his rental apartment would be "well suited for professional adults." A short time later, he was accused of housing discrimination.