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FOR THE SECOND TIME, THE CITY OF CHICAGO TAKES LEGAL ACTION AGAINST A CHICAGO PROPERTY OWNER FOR DEFRAUDING THE CITY'S EMERGENCY RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

In this second lawsuit, the defendant obtained thousands of federal dollars dedicated for at-risk Chicagoans during economic hardship brought forth by COVID-19.

CHICAGO – Corporation Counsel Mary B. Richardson-Lowry filed a [second lawsuit](#) against a property owner for defrauding the City's Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). This new lawsuit is against Monique Rhivers, a former City employee who submitted several fraudulent ERAP applications and obtained at least \$79,000 in funds intended to assist people facing housing insecurity during the pandemic. The City seeks triple damages, as well as penalties and the City's legal fees.

The Chicago Department of Housing (DOH) established ERAP under strict guidelines to protect tenants struggling to pay rent and who were most at risk of facing eviction due to pandemic financial hardships. Under the program, eligible tenants could receive up to 12 months of back pay rental and utility-payment assistance in addition to up to three months of future rent and utility payments. Once an ERAP application was merged with the landlord's and approved, the designated funds were sent directly to the landlord. Two rounds of federal grants authorized by Congress in December 2020 and March 2021 financed ERAP.

ERAP was a successful program that helped thousands of renters. Notably, ERAP was recognized by the White House in 2022 for further developing innovative pilot programs, one of which included Right to Counsel, which offers free legal representation to Chicago tenants facing eviction and will be continued as one of DOH's programs for 2025.

A joint investigation conducted by DOH and the Department of Law (DOL) revealed a troubling pattern in the defendant's ERAP applications. Rhivers submitted sham lease agreements, claimed tenants who did not rent from her, and submitted or assisted in the submission of false income attestation forms.

When the City subpoenaed Rhivers for information, she invoked her Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination and asked the City to allow her to repay the ERAP funds she had received. After delaying settlement over the course of several months, Rhivers ultimately refused to cooperate with the City's investigation and refused to repay the City.

“Today marks the second lawsuit the City has brought in a matter of months for the abuse of a rental assistance program designed to help struggling Chicago renters,” said **Corporation Counsel Richardson-Lowry**. “Fraudulently obtaining City funds for personal gain comes at a steep price. We will continue to use litigation to hold these fraudsters accountable.”

"As public stewards, we have a responsibility to uphold the trust of our communities and guarantee that every dollar is used effectively to provide stability and security for those facing housing instability," said **DOH Commissioner Lissette Castañeda**. "Our commitment to addressing fraud, though it is a minimal occurrence, through litigation serves as a deterrent and ensures that resources meant for vulnerable households are protected from exploitation. By holding the few bad actors accountable, we strengthen the integrity of the entire program and safeguard its ability to serve those who are most in need."

The City is represented in this suit by Deputy Corporation Counsel Stephen Kane and Assistant Corporation Counsel Chelsey Metcalf from the Department of Law's Affirmative Litigation Division.

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