

For Immediate Release
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Philadelphia families assert their rights to quality housing in court in efforts to benefit hundreds more low-income tenants

Philadelphia, Pa. – Two low-income families are hoping to shine a light on abusive tenant practices by taking their property management company and landlord to court. Both families are represented by the Public Interest Law Center.

Kenisha Mathis, a mother of two young children, moved her family into a home in North Philadelphia that was managed by ABC Capital. But the unit was in need of many repairs, including electrical issues, a broken window, and serious water damage in the kitchen, which resulted in a collapsing ceiling. And, in spite of having two young children, neither Ms. Mathis, nor the City Health Department, received a lead safe certificate from a lead inspector as required by Philadelphia law.

“I asked ABC Capital multiple times to come and make repairs in my home. They never came,” said Ms. Mathis. “Instead, they tried to evict me and my family.”

Corrine Morris and Charles Hagood are the parents of two young children. They rented an apartment in East Germantown owned by a Brooklyn-based company called Home 4 Rent, Inc. Their home was similarly in need of serious repairs, and like Ms. Mathis, they did not receive a lead safe certificate. Their most significant issue was the broken pipe in the basement, which kept water from reaching the first and second floors. Ms. Morris, while pregnant, had to haul buckets of water up from the basement to flush the toilet, bathe her child, and cook. The Department of Licenses & Inspections found nine other violations upon surveying the property. In September 2017, the Water Department came out and shut off the water for good.

“Without running water and other unfinished repairs, we had to find somewhere else for our family to sleep and the property became just a glorified storage unit,” said Ms. Morris. “Home 4 Rent tried to evict us so they would not have to make repairs.”

Both families were referred to the Public Interest Law Center for help. The Public Interest Law Center is helping tenants bring affirmative cases in an effort to hold landlords, management companies, and their agents, accountable to city laws and to the rights of low-income tenants.

“People have a right to safe and healthy housing,” said George Donnelly, who represents both families. Mr. Donnelly is a Penn Law Postgraduate Fellow at the Public Interest Law Center, funded by the Langer, Grogan & Diver Fellowship in Social Justice. “These cases have the potential to address one of the main barriers low-income tenants face in finding quality housing: landlords and management companies that refuse to make repairs.”

As part of a strategy to help as many families as possible, the Public Interest Law Center is working with its clients to identify landlords and property managers that own a significant number of rental units. ABC Capital manages hundreds of properties in North and West Philadelphia and Home 4 Rent, Inc., has 50 properties across the city.

The law firm of Klehr Harrison Harvey Branzburg LLP is serving as co-counsel to Ms. Morris and Mr. Hagood.

There are an estimated 42,000 low-income families that rent homes in Philadelphia, and many face the same issues the Mathis and Morris families have had to deal with. In addition to these lawsuits, the Public Interest Law Center has helped another family secure a \$35,000 settlement with a former landlord, helped a veteran with disabilities vacate a \$5,000 judgment entered against him, and represented a dozen other families in eviction proceedings in Municipal Court. The Law Center is also helping Ms. Morris sue her landlord's lawyer for allegedly violating federal law by using misleading debt collection practices while attempting to evict her and force her to pay rent she did not owe. Ms. Morris is a named plaintiff in that [federal class action litigation](#).

“These cases and settlements show that following the law is not an option, but a requirement,” said Mr. Donnelly.

[Click here to read the Mathis family complaint.](#)

[Click here to read the Morris family complaint.](#)

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The Public Interest Law Center uses high-impact legal strategies to advance the civil, social, and economic rights of communities in the Philadelphia region facing discrimination, inequality, and poverty. We use litigation, community education, advocacy, and organizing to secure their access to fundamental resources and services in the areas of public education, housing, health care, employment, environmental justice and voting. For more information visit www.pubintlaw.org or follow on Twitter [@PubIntLawCtr](https://twitter.com/PubIntLawCtr).