

HUD files discrimination suit on behalf of non-renter

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Housing and Urban Affairs Department has filed housing discrimination charges on behalf of a non-renter — the boyfriend of a tenant who claimed her landlord intimidated them because they are a biracial couple.

The charges — the first of their kind to be pressed by HUD — accuse landlord Thomas Nail of Starke, Fla., of threatening the couple, raising the woman's rent and using racial slurs to harass them. A civil suit, filed on behalf of couple by the Justice Department, will be tried in federal court.

Carole Hernandez, who is white, and her boyfriend, Gilbert Wright, who is black, brought the complaint in Oc-

Jackson — (Continued from Page 1)

Since the last meeting, GM has bought stakes in Fiat Auto Spa and Fuji Heavy Industries, Ltd., the maker of Subaru vehicles. The automaker also has brought out a series of well-received concept cars and trucks.

But several shareholders focused on GM's declining market share and what the company's top leadership was doing to reverse the trend. Through May, GM's U.S.-based brands had 25.8 percent of the U.S. market for cars and light trucks — a decline of about one percentage point from last year.

Wagoner declined to talk about specific targets for GM's market share. He said the company was doing well in trucks and mid-size cars, but suffering from tough competition in small cars.

"We have to sell to the strengths and address the weaknesses," Wagoner said. "I hope over time, I suspect over time that will lead to higher market share. But I find predicting it from month to month is not something I've had much success at."

GM also announced Tuesday a 3-for-1 stock split of shares in Hughes Electronics, the wholly-owned GM subsidiary that makes satellite TV systems. Hughes stockholders who hold the tracking stock on June 13 will get three new shares for every share they hold, effective June 20.

Shares of GM were trading down \$1.875 to \$69.25 Tuesday afternoon on the New York Stock Exchange, while shares of Hughes were trading down 6.25 cents to \$102.563.

tober 1998. Hernandez said the intimidation began shortly after she moved to the single-family home in August 1997.

Nail would confront Hernandez after Wright's visits, she said, which made the couple uncomfortable enough to meet in her home secretly and at odd hours. Wright said he would hide in Hernandez's closet to avoid Nail.

Hernandez said Nail raised

her monthly rent from \$250 to \$300 without reason and when the couple decided to move, tried to have Wright arrested on a bogus accusation that he had stolen their moving truck.

HUD has also filed charges on behalf of Hernandez. The charges, filed Wednesday, are the first brought on behalf of a non-renter under the 32-year-old Fair Housing Act, the agency

said.

HUD spokeswoman Peggy Johannsen said that all discrimination complaints must be investigated and go through mediation, which may account for the time it took for HUD to file the charges in this case.

HUD investigates about one-third of roughly 11,000 Fair Housing Act complaints it has received each year since 1996, Johannsen said. Of

those investigated, about 2,500 are complaints of racial discrimination, she said.

HUD files bias charges in about 300 cases each year, with the remaining cases usually resolved through mediation. If Nail is found guilty, a federal court could award monetary compensation for damages, mental distress, loss of housing rights and court costs. It also could assess punitive damages if the Jus-

Justice Department, which is handling the case, finds a pattern of housing discrimination.

"The Fair Housing Act protects the right of any American to live in any home and in any neighborhood that they can afford," said HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo. "This department will continue to aggressively pursue those who ignore the law and abrogate that right."

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