

Wednesday, November 8, 2023

Andrea Campbell. Attorney General of Massachusetts
Attorney General's Office
Massachusetts Department of Justice
Attn: Public Protection and Advocacy Bureau
1 Ashburton Place, 20th Floor,
Boston, MA 02108

Re: Landlord Companies Accused of Illegal Rent-Fixing in Washington D.C. Also Hold Properties in Massachusetts

Dear Attorney General Campbell:

On behalf of nonpartisan government watchdog Accountable.US, I am writing to encourage you to review the business dealings of major rental companies operating in Massachusetts that were among the fourteen landlords sued by District of Columbia Attorney General Brian Schwab's office over allegations they ["illegally rais\[ed\] rents for tens of thousands of residents by collectively sharing their data with \[property management software company RealPage\]."](#)

[Equity Residential](#) is among the companies involved in the lawsuit with ties to Massachusetts that we are especially concerned may be engaging in price-fixing elsewhere given their troubling histories of profiteering and misconduct. In recent years, Accountable.US has documented how too many corporations are motivated by greed and are price-gouging consumers. And the landlord industry is often among the worst offenders. It is critical that enforcers of consumer protection and antitrust laws like yourself stand up for consumers instead of corporations that profit from rising prices.

In a report [released last year](#) that received national attention [from CBS News](#), we found similar greedy practices Equity Residential. Notably, Equity Residential touted its "pricing power" as it talked about increased rents while reporting that its FY 2021 net income jumped by 45% to almost \$1.4 billion while being sued by 135,000 applicants for "unlawful conduct" in its fee practices. Meanwhile, the company CEO's compensation increased by 11% to nearly \$8.5 million.

Securities and Exchange Commission records indicate that Equity Residential runs 7,170 units across 27 properties in the state, as of December 31, 2022.

As we have documented, these companies have shown their recent rent hikes were based on greed, not need, after reporting massive increased profits over the previous year while generously rewarding their executives. Now the same companies fueling the housing affordability crisis have allegedly stooped to illegal price-fixing and collusion to pad their profits – making matters worse for many struggling renters in Washington D.C.

The question is: If these companies were willing to allegedly engage in rent fixing surrounded by federal and local regulators in the nation's capital, why not in Massachusetts as well? In our view, it is worth looking into whether Massachusetts tenants dealing with these same companies are not also victims of illegal practices that further drive housing costs through the roof.

As you know, the U.S. Labor Department's latest Consumer Price Index (CPI) report found that shelter was by far ["the largest contributor" to inflation in September](#). We know corporate profiteering played a major role in that. You may be able to answer whether illegal price collusion also contributed to the problem in Massachusetts. If you agree this matter merits a serious review, we look forward to hearing about the results of your office's findings.

Sincerely,



Caroline Ciccone
President, Accountable.US