

VT SUPERIOR COURT
WASHINGTON UNIT
STATE OF VERMONT
SUPERIOR COURT
WASHINGTON UNIT

2018 FEB 12 P 3:07

In Re: JONATHAN PIERCE

) CIVIL DIVISION
) Docket No. 97-2-18 Wnew

ASSURANCE OF DISCONTINUANCE

The State of Vermont, by and through Vermont Attorney General Thomas J. Donovan, Jr., and Jonathan Pierce (“Respondent”), hereby enter into this Assurance of Discontinuance (“AOD”) pursuant to 9 V.S.A. § 2459.

Regulatory Framework

1. Lead-based paint in housing, the focus of the Vermont lead law, is a leading cause of childhood lead poisoning, which can result in adverse health effects, including decreases in IQ.
2. All paint in pre-1978 housing is presumed to be lead-based unless a certified inspector has determined that it is not lead-based. 18 V.S.A. § 1759(a).
3. All paint in rental target housing is “presumed to be lead-based unless a lead inspector or lead risk assessor has determined that it is not lead-based.” 18 V.S.A. § 1760(a).
4. The lead law requires that essential maintenance practices (“EMPs”) specified in 18 V.S.A. § 1759 be performed at all pre-1978 rental housing.
5. EMPs include, but are not limited to, installing window well inserts, visually inspecting properties at least annually for deteriorated paint, restoring surfaces to be free of deteriorated paint within 30 days after such paint has been visually identified

or reported to the owner, and posting lead-based paint hazard information in a prominent place. 18 V.S.A. § 1759(a) (2), (4) and (7).

6. The EMP requirements also mandate that an owner of rental target housing file affidavits or compliance statements attesting to EMP performance with the Vermont Department of Health and with the owner's insurance carrier. 18 V.S.A. § 1759(b).
7. A violation of the lead law requirements may result in a maximum civil penalty of \$10,000.00. 18 V.S.A. § 130(b)(6). Each day that a violation continues is a separate violation. 18 V.S.A. § 130(b)(6).
8. The Vermont Consumer Protection Act, 9 V.S.A Chapter 63, prohibits unfair and deceptive acts and practices, which includes the offering for rent, or the renting of, target housing that is noncompliant with the lead law.
9. Violations of the Consumer Protection Act are subject to a civil penalty of up to \$10,000.00 per violation. 9 V.S.A. § 2458(b)(1). Each day that a violation continues is a separate violation.

Respondent's Rental Housing and Lead Compliance Practices

10. Respondent is the owner of seven rental properties: (1) 32 Johnson Street, Barre; (2) 7 Farwell Street, Barre; (3) 76-78 Maple Street, Barre; (4) 850 Graniteville Road, Graniteville; (5) 852 Graniteville Road, Graniteville; (6) 300-302 Elm Street, Montpelier; and (7) 2333 VT Route 14, Williamstown ("the Properties").
11. The Properties were constructed prior to 1978, and therefore, are pre-1978 "rental target housing" within the meaning of the Vermont lead law, 18 V.S.A. § 1751(23), and are subject to the requirements of 18 V.S.A. Chapter 38.

12. Respondent has in the past and continues presently to rent and offer for rent units in the Properties.
13. On September 28, 2017, Respondent filed with the Vermont Department of Health an “EMP Rental Property Compliance Statement” for 76-78 Maple Street and 2333 VT Route 14.
14. The EMP Statements represented that Respondent performed EMPs at 76-78 Maple Street on September 2, 2017, and at 2333 VT Route 14 on September 8, 2017.
15. The EMP Statements specifically certified that Respondent:
 - a. visually inspected exterior surfaces and outbuildings and did not identify deteriorated paint exceeding 1 square foot on exterior surfaces of the buildings; and
 - b. removed visible paint chips from the outdoor area of the buildings.
16. The EMP Statements were signed by Jonathan Pierce and certified that “all information provided on this form is true and accurate” and acknowledged that “providing false, incomplete or inaccurate information on this form is unlawful and is punishable by civil and criminal penalties pursuant to Vermont law.”
17. On October 4, 2017, Vermont Department of Health staff inspected the exterior of 76-78 Maple Street and 2333 VT Route 14 and documented (via photographs) deteriorated paint exceeding more than 1 square foot on the properties’ exterior surfaces, and observed visible paint chips on the ground at 2333 VT Route 14.
18. Respondent admits the facts described in ¶¶ 10-17.

The State's Allegations

19. The Vermont Attorney General's Office alleges the following violations of the Consumer Protection Act and Lead Law:

- a. Submitting a false EMP compliance statement and inaccurately representing that the properties were in compliance with the lead law.

20. The State of Vermont alleges that the above behavior constitutes unfair and deceptive acts and practices under 9 V.S.A. § 2453.

Assurances and Relief

In lieu of instituting an action or proceeding against Respondent, the Attorney General and Respondent are willing to accept this AOD pursuant to 9 V.S.A. § 2459. Accordingly, the parties agree as follows:

21. Respondent shall fully and timely comply with the requirements of the Vermont lead law, 18 V.S.A., Chapter 38, as long as they maintain any ownership or property management interest in the property and in any other pre-1978 rental housing in which they currently have, or later acquire, an ownership or property management interest.
22. By May 31, 2018, all exterior EMP work of the Properties shall be completed in a lead-safe manner in accordance with 18 V.S.A. § 1760. Until the exterior work is complete, Respondent shall restrict access to exterior surfaces and components of the Properties with lead hazards and areas directly below the deteriorated surfaces, pursuant to 18 V.S.A. § 1759(a)(3). If Respondent requires additional time to complete the work, Respondent will contact the Department of Health to request an extension of time agreement before the expiration of the above deadlines and provide

a detailed justification for any extension. Any extension will be granted only for the exterior of the Properties; all interior work must be completed by December 31, 2017.

23. Within one week of completion of the EMP work at the Properties described in the paragraph above, Respondent will file with the Vermont Department of Health, Respondent's insurance carrier and with the Office of the Attorney General, an updated and completed EMP compliance statement for the Properties, and will give a copy of the compliance statement to an adult in each rented unit of the Properties. The copy for the Office of the Attorney General shall be sent to: Justin Kolber, Assistant Attorney General, Office of the Attorney General, 109 State Street, Montpelier, Vermont 05609.
24. In the event Respondent wishes to rent a unit which becomes vacant in any of Respondent's pre-1978 rental housing before such housing is made EMP compliant, Respondent shall provide advance written notice of the intent to rent to the Office of the Attorney General at the address listed above. Respondent's advance written notice shall also: (1) verify that the interior of the specific unit to be rented is EMP compliant; or (2) provide an update as to any remaining EMP work to be performed at the property, including the date by which the entire property will be EMP compliant. Otherwise, Respondent shall not rent, or offer for rent, any unit which becomes vacant in any of property owned or managed by Respondent that is not EMP compliant until such time as the EMP work is complete and the EMP compliance statement is distributed as described above.

25. Respondent shall pay the sum of \$10,000 in civil penalties and costs for the filing of false EMP compliance statements, as follows: (1) \$3,000 paid to the "State of Vermont" and sent to the following address: Justin E. Kolber, Assistant Attorney General, Office of the Attorney General, 109 State Street, Montpelier, Vermont 05609; and (2) \$7,000 to be expended on lead hazard reduction improvements at any of the Properties.

Other Terms

26. This AOD is binding on Respondent, however, sale of any pre-1978 rental property may not occur unless Respondent has complied with all obligations under this AOD, or this AOD is amended in writing to transfer to the buyer or other transferee all remaining obligations.

27. Transfer of ownership of any of Respondent's pre-1978 rental property shall be consistent with Vermont law, including the provisions of 18 V.S.A. § 1767 specifically relating to the transfer of ownership of pre-1978 rental housing.

28. This AOD shall not affect marketability of title.

29. Nothing in this AOD in any way affects Respondent's other obligations under state, local, or federal law.

30. In addition to any other penalties or relief which might be appropriate under Vermont law, any future failure by Respondent to comply with the terms of this AOD shall be subject to a liquidated civil penalty paid to the State of Vermont in the amount of at least \$5,000 and not more than \$10,000.

**Office of the
ATTORNEY
GENERAL
109 State Street
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05609**

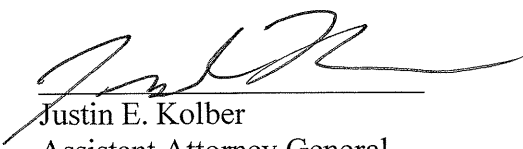
SIGNATURES APPEAR ON NEXT PAGE

DATED at Montpelier, Vermont this 12th day of ~~January~~ ^{February}, 2018.

STATE OF VERMONT

THOMAS J. DONOVAN, JR.
ATTORNEY GENERAL

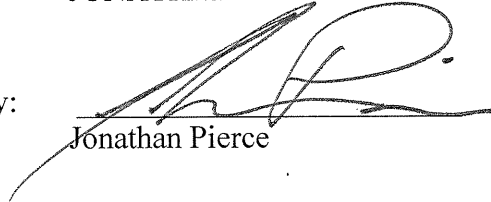
By:


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DATED at Montpelier, VT this 31 day of January, 2018.

JONATHAN PIERCE

By:


Jonathan Pierce