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## Suit filed against Hawaii Public Housing Authority

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HONOLULU (AP) - Calling the state "the largest slumlord" in Hawaii, Lawyers for Equal Justice filed federal and state class-action lawsuits Thursday against the Hawaii Public Housing Authority.

The legal action, which was joined by several private attorneys and six tenants, addresses conditions at two of the largest and oldest public housing properties in the state - Kuhio Park Terrace and Kuhio Homes in Kalihi on Oahu. Kuhio Park Terrace, or KPT, has 614 units in two 16-floor towers. Kuhio Homes is a low-rise complex with 134 units.

The suit alleges the housing authority isn't following federal inspection and maintenance standards at the two housing projects, and has also failed to ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"It's tragic today that we find the state the largest slum landlord that we have," Victor Geminiani, executive director of Lawyers for Equal Justice, said at a news conference.

The state attorney general's office said it couldn't comment on the legal action because it hadn't seen the lawsuit.

Rep. Joey Manahan, D-Kalihi-Kapalama, sided with the residents.

"It is a shame that it had to come to a lawsuit, but I've been appalled by the conditions at KPT for a long time, and I believe the residents have a legitimate complaint," Manahan said. "The conditions they are living in are unsafe, unhealthy and unacceptable. Public safety should always be our first priority."

The suit speaks of "hazardous conditions" and "discriminatory obstacles" at Kuhio Park Terrace and Kuhio Homes.

Kuhio Park Terrace has nonfunctioning and "dangerous" elevators that impede mobility for the disabled and elderly, and it has no fire evacuation plan despite persistent fire code violations, the suit said.

The lawsuit also alleged "the air at KPT is filled with hazardous particulates," including soot dust from frequent trash fires, roach dust and rat allergens.

The tenants of Kuhio Park Terrace also must contend with "leaking and burst pipes, and plumbing backups, causing brown wastewater to fill housing units," the lawsuit said.

State officials said a fire alarm replacement system costing \$1.6 million is due next month, trash chutes costing more than \$880,000 will be installed in April, and a \$4.1 million elevator replacement project is slated to begin next fall.

The lawsuit asks the court to order improved conditions at the two properties, as well as an unspecified amount of damages.

In a related action, Lawyers for Equal Justice filed a complaint seeking rent rebates for Kuhio Park Terrace tenants because of "squalid, unsafe and unsanitary" conditions.

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