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## Our View: Rokita might help end 'disgraceful' conditions

The Herald Bulletin Editorial Board  
Jun 25, 2024



The grass grew high and the buildings were not maintained at Bingham Square Apartments in Anderson, as seen in this June 2023 photo.

Richard Sitler, file | The Herald Bulletin



Thomas Gibbs spent his last days in an apartment with no furnace and no running water. Above his bed, the ceiling leaked water.

His rent was \$735 a month at Bingham Square Apartments in the 2700 block of West 16th Street. On Dec. 23, 2023, the 78-year-old died inside his apartment.

That tragic set of circumstances is among four personal stories alleged in a lawsuit filed by Indiana Attorney General Todd Rokita's office citing unlivable conditions at two Anderson apartment complexes.

The attorney general's involvement is appreciated in a dispute where the city has filed civil lawsuits yielding limited results so far.

In short, Rokita has sued the owners of the 129-unit Bingham Square Apartments and the 89-unit Madison Square Apartments, at least what's left of Madison Square after fire tore through the roof of Building J in May 2022.

Of those four personal stories mentioned previously, one family was inside their apartment when smoke began rolling through. That same family often bought cases of water at the store because leaks were allegedly so pervasive that it was common for management to turn off water valves.

For the record, the defendants in Rokita's lawsuit are PR Bingham LLC; PR Madison LLC; Property Resource Associates LLC; and Gary Plichta, who is the property manager living in Florida. Bingham Square Apartments was acquired in 2019 with a \$2.7 million loan from Landmark Bank and \$900,000 in tax increment financing bonds from the Anderson Redevelopment Commission.

In 2021, Bingham contracted with the Anderson Housing Authority to provide Section 8 vouchers for qualifying low-income renters. The project seemed viable as the occupancy rate grew to nearly 90 households paying rent.

Now, the AG alleges that Bingham canceled the Section 8 contract and began evicting residents after being notified that 21 units did not meet housing standards.

Fire, flooding and break-ins followed.

The AG's Consumer Protection Division's Homeowners Protection Unit began to investigate.

"The way that hardworking Hoosiers are alleged to have been treated by these defendants is disgraceful," Rokita said. "Not every investment in real property can be successful, but it's unconscionable to simply abandon these properties and force stranded families to figure out how to fend for themselves after they paid their rent."

Madison Square had a similar ride, according to Rokita.

Last July, Rokita sued the managers of a northside Indianapolis apartment complex alleging that they habitually failed to respond to residents' maintenance calls, allowed conditions to become uninhabitable, failed to provide executed lease agreements, and improperly billed tenants.

The case is still pending in Marion County.

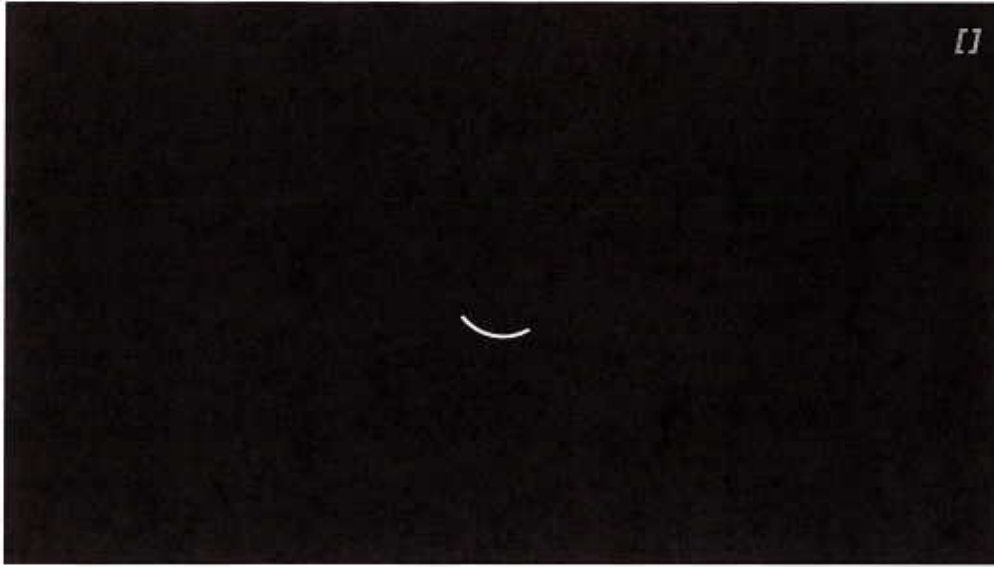
These lawsuits show that somebody is listening. Somebody is concerned about the welfare of low-income Hoosiers. Perhaps that somebody has the clout needed to find solutions for safe and clean housing.

A resolution, if any, will arrive too late for Thomas Gibbs.

However, the city of Anderson, its Housing Authority and its Redevelopment Commission need all the help they can get in improving the quality of life for all of its residents.

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