

LANDLORD NIGHTMARE ENDS IN \$2.5 MILLION RECKONING

Former Tenants Set to Get Paid as Properties Are Sold - and Eviction Filings Are Scrubbed

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HAMPTON ROADS, VIRGINIA - The tenants may have lost their homes, but according to a report from WHRO Public Media, the story is ending with something far more consequential than another eviction notice: a historic \$2.5 million fair-housing settlement, financial compensation for former residents, the sale of more than 60 properties, and the clearing of eviction filings that may have followed displaced tenants long after they left.

At the center of the controversy is former Hampton Roads landlord **David Merryman**.

And this is no ordinary landlord-tenant dispute.

According to the report, Merryman is currently serving a **17-year federal fraud sentence**. He has also been **permanently barred from operating as a landlord in Virginia** after state-court proceedings concerning his treatment of tenants.

Now, the people who once lived in his properties are preparing to receive compensation.

MORE THAN 60 PROPERTIES - SOLD

The reported settlement totals approximately **\$2.5 million**, with compensation expected to begin reaching former tenants within the coming month.

Where is some of that money coming from?

According to the report, Merryman's extensive Virginia real-estate holdings are being sold pursuant to court order - **more than 60 properties**.

Think about that number.

Not one building. Not one duplex. Not one troubled apartment complex. **More than sixty properties**.

Assets that once represented a sprawling rental operation are now reportedly helping fund relief for the very tenants at the center of the litigation.

BLACK WOMEN, HOUSING NEGLECT AND RETALIATORY EVICTIONS

But the money is only part of this story.

The allegations and findings described in the report are particularly disturbing because the affected residents were reportedly **predominantly Black women**.

The WHRO report states that state courts found Merryman subjected tenants to **severe housing neglect, harassment and retaliatory evictions**.

That transforms this story from a routine dispute over rent and repairs into a much larger question:

What happens when the people who control someone's housing allegedly use that power against the very tenants demanding livable conditions?

For vulnerable renters, an eviction filing can be devastating even before anyone is physically removed.

The filing itself can become part of the tenant's rental history. Future landlords may discover it during screening. Families attempting to relocate can suddenly find doors closing before they ever get the opportunity to explain what actually happened.

Which makes another component of this settlement especially significant.

THE EVICTIONS ARE BEING SCRUBBED

The settlement reportedly requires qualifying eviction filings against former residents to be **scrubbed from the record**.

That may prove nearly as valuable to some tenants as the monetary compensation.

An eviction case can haunt a renter long after the underlying dispute ends. A tenant may prevail, settle, move voluntarily, or have compelling reasons for withholding rent or challenging living conditions - yet the existence of the filing can still create practical obstacles when searching for another home.

For displaced families, removing those records can mean something extraordinarily simple: **A chance to start over**.

No old landlord dispute appearing during a routine housing search. No unexplained court filing becoming an automatic red flag. No years-old eviction case standing between a family and its next apartment.

THIS WASN'T JUST ABOUT MONEY

The reported resolution demonstrates why major civil-rights and housing cases are sometimes structured around more than damages.

Money compensates. But structural relief can change what happens afterward.

Here, the reported remedies reach several different fronts: former tenants receive compensation; Merryman's properties are being sold; he is permanently prohibited from operating as a Virginia landlord; and eviction filings associated with former residents are to be cleared under the settlement.

Taken together, those measures represent something considerably broader than simply writing checks. They represent an attempt to unwind the consequences of what happened.

THE QUESTION EVERY TENANT SHOULD BE ASKING

The sensational facts surrounding this case should not obscure its larger lesson.

What happens to tenants who do not have lawyers, government intervention, investigators or years to fight back?

Housing disputes rarely occur between parties with equal leverage.

A landlord controls the property. A tenant may be fighting simultaneously to preserve shelter, protect children, document dangerous conditions, keep utilities operating, maintain employment and locate alternative housing. And once eviction enters the picture, the pressure intensifies.

This case illustrates why photographs, videos, maintenance requests, emails, inspection reports, code-enforcement records, rent receipts and written communications can become enormously important.

Today's irritating maintenance complaint can become tomorrow's critical exhibit. Today's photograph of deteriorating conditions can become tomorrow's evidence. And today's eviction filing may eventually become part of a much larger examination of why the eviction occurred in the first place.

THE EMPIRE IS BEING LIQUIDATED. THE TENANTS ARE GETTING PAID.

There is an unmistakable reversal at the heart of this story.

The former landlord is imprisoned. His ability to operate as a landlord in Virginia is reportedly over. More than 60 properties are being sold. A multimillion-dollar settlement is moving toward distribution. And former tenants who once faced the enormous imbalance of power inherent in a landlord-tenant relationship are now positioned to receive compensation and relief from eviction records that could otherwise have followed them into their next housing search.

For those tenants, the settlement cannot erase what happened. But it can provide money. It can remove barriers. It can clear records. And perhaps most importantly, it can establish something that tenants facing deplorable conditions are too often told to stop expecting: **Accountability.**

EDITOR'S NOTE

This article is a tabloid-style commentary based on the information contained in the uploaded WHRO Public Media news post. Descriptions of judicial findings, settlement terms, criminal proceedings and other factual matters should be attributed to the underlying reporting and official court records when this article is prepared for publication. The dramatic language and rhetorical questions used here are commentary and should not be understood as adding factual allegations beyond the source material.