

Section 8 residents claim private security company harasses them

By Jonah Newman | September 8, 2015



Photo by Max Herman

Sheena Godfrey stands outside her home at the Concordia Place Apartments in Riverdale.

When paramedics arrived, Jesse Bogan was still handcuffed to the wall, blood spurting from three gaping wounds in his left foot.

A German Shepherd named Demon had bitten through his sneaker and held on to his foot for several minutes. Demon is a guard dog for A-Alert Security and Investigations, the private company hired to police Concordia Place Apartments, the subsidized housing complex on the Far South Side where Bogan grew up.

About 30 minutes before paramedics arrived, Ricky Martinez, the owner of the security company, had stopped Bogan and his friend as they were driving out of the development, according to a written account by Bogan. "Get the f*** out of the car," Martinez yelled three times after jumping out of a company SUV with his gun drawn. Soon, three more security guards arrived, pulled Bogan out of the passenger seat and took him to the security office, where they handcuffed him to a pole mounted on the wall.

That's when Martinez came back with Demon. The company said Bogan provoked the dog. But in a lawsuit, Bogan said the dog charged at him, urged on by Martinez and the other guards, who laughed as he was attacked. Afterward, Martinez and the guards left with the dog; Bogan, bleeding, called 911.

The security company charged him with criminal trespassing. The charges were dropped when Martinez failed to appear in court.

Residents of Concordia Place, a 297-unit federally subsidized housing development, say the June 2013 incident is just one example of a pattern of harassment and overzealous policing by Martinez and his private security company.

In April 2015, 26 African-American residents and guests filed a federal lawsuit against Martinez, A-Alert, and DRE, Inc., which owns both the property and the management company, Promex Midwest. Bogan, now 31, and another former resident filed separate lawsuits accusing Martinez, A-Alert and the other defendants of using excessive force and conducting illegal searches and seizures. They allege that A-Alert's behavior amounts to racial discrimination and a violation of their civil rights.

Despite the three pending lawsuits, Martinez and A-Alert continue to patrol Concordia Place with military-style assault rifles and a guard dog, supported by taxpayer money from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which pays DRE, Inc. monthly rental subsidies of \$3 million per year, according to Dennis Egidi, the president of the company.

He said A-Alert is necessary to protect residents from gangs and drugs.

"We're not trying to create a police state or anything. We're just trying to make it safe for everybody," Egidi said. "These guys carry guns because the opposition carries guns."

Sarah Lampel, Promex's director of operations and compliance, declined to comment, as did Martinez, through his lawyer.

A HUD spokesman said the agency is conducting a management review of Concordia Place in response to complaints about A-Alert, but he wouldn't provide details, citing the lawsuits.

The situation raises concerns about the increasing use of private security companies to police public housing complexes across the city and whether HUD is lax in its oversight of the companies.

The residents' allegations paint a consistent and troubling picture of how Martinez and A-Alert guards treat them and their guests:

- They wear bullet proof vests and carry assault rifles, handguns and Tasers, which they aim at residents and visitors.
- They ban guests from the property without cause and, often, without informing them that they've been barred. When the guests return, they physically detain them and have them charged with criminal trespassing.
- As recently as Aug. 21, a dozen A-Alert security guards set up a checkpoint at Concordia Place and stopped every car they didn't recognize to ask drivers for ID and the reason for their visit, even cars driven by residents.
- Many of the incidents take place at night or on weekends, when the on-site management office is closed and no one is there to hear complaints.
- A-Alert often refuses to investigate when residents inform the company about criminal activity.
- When residents complain to management about A-Alert, they say their concerns are ignored.

Concordia Place is part of HUD's Section 8 Housing Assistance Program, which subsidizes developments that rent to very low-income families. The subsidies are based on how much rent each tenant can afford but, unlike Housing Choice Vouchers, are tied to the development, not to individual tenants. If a resident moves, she loses her rental assistance. As a result, some tenants are hesitant to complain to management or join the lawsuit because they fear being evicted and left with nowhere to go, some residents say.



http://chicagoporter.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/files/2015/09/080615_ConcordiaPlace_MH_05.jpg

Photo by Max Herman

The sign at the entrance of Concordia Place Apartments seen through a chain link fence.

Housing experts and lawyers say the way the Section 8 system is set up makes it easy for management and owners to intimidate and ignore the concerns of low-income residents.

“In subsidized properties, your voucher is very hard to come by and very easy to lose,” said Paul Burns, an organizer with the Metropolitan Tenants Organization who helped renters at Concordia Place form a tenants association in June.

HUD has the power to withhold rent payments from property owners who don't provide “decent, safe and sanitary housing,” but they rarely use it, housing experts say.

Jerry Brown, a Washington-based spokesman for the housing agency, said, “I can say without a shadow of a doubt, HUD is taking action. Whenever there are complaints voiced by tenants in cases that are similar to this, HUD takes action.”

Residents say they hope HUD acts quickly, because they are desperate for relief from Martinez and the other A-Alert security guards.

“I pray to God to get me up out of here before next summer,” said Deborah Lewis, who has lived at Concordia Place for more than 14 years, her voice breaking. “Because I can't live like this.”

Security company makes residents feel unsafe

At first glance, Concordia Place looks idyllic. A small road encircles more than two dozen two- and three-story brown and white apartment buildings. Sidewalks cut through manicured lawns between buildings like paths navigating through a college campus.

It looks like an oasis in the industrial wasteland of Riverdale, Chicago's poorest and most isolated community area, on the city's southern edge. Across the street from Concordia sits the entrance to one of Chicago's wastewater treatment facilities. Riverdale's 7,000 residents have a median income of less than \$14,000, according to the most recent Census data. In 2010, 45 percent of the area's buildings were vacant (<http://chicagoporter.com/not-just-gary-vacant-houses-plague-some-chicago-neighborhoods-too/>), the highest rate in the city.

“It's a very difficult part of town,” said Egidi, who visits the property about twice a year.

Before A-Alert was hired, the security cameras at Concordia Place were shot out, he said.

“I'd be the first one in the world to have no security and save \$275,000 a year,” he said.

But current and former resident say Concordia Place has always been a relatively safe place to live.

“Concordia has never been a violent place. Never,” said Sheena Godfrey, a resident for 13 years, who is 8 months pregnant.

She said A-Alert has made it more dangerous to live there, not less.

Last year, when an ex-boyfriend tried to break into her apartment while she was home, Godfrey called the security office for help; they told her to call the Chicago Police Department instead, she said. A-Alert officers also have been seen speeding their Blue Chevy Tahoe across the development’s grassy lawns, where children play, Godfrey and other residents say. Security officers hit her parked car in January 2014 while pursuing someone, Godfrey said.

“They’ll pick and choose” which crimes to pursue, she said, often focusing on seemingly minor infractions.

One night in March, Martinez mistook Godfrey’s cell phone flashlight for its video camera, which he thought she was using to film him and other A-Alert security guards as they searched another resident’s car. A management company rule prohibits tenants from photographing or filming security guards; a violation could result in eviction.

Martinez threatened at the time to cite her for a lease violation, tow her brother’s Jeep and “ban each and every one” of her visitors and guests, she said.

A few weeks later, Martinez seemed to make good on his promise. He barred from the property Godfrey’s boyfriend, who helps support her and her children and is the father of her unborn baby.

Godfrey, a plaintiff in the tenant lawsuit, said it took her months to get a meeting with the property manager to find out why he was barred. The manager told Godfrey in July that her boyfriend was barred because he didn’t have a driver’s license and his car wasn’t registered, she said. Godfrey doesn’t understand why that should be a reason to ban someone from the property.

“A common sense person can tell you that there is such a lack of criminal activity out here, what he’s doing out here is he’s trying to make them needed,” she said about Martinez. “He’s trying to prove [to management] that, ‘See, you guys gotta keep us out here because we’re fighting this crime.’”

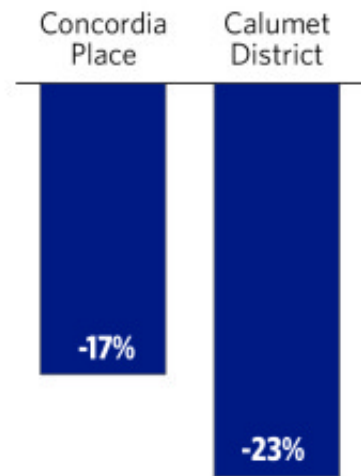
An analysis of crime data from the Chicago Police Department shows that “index crimes” like theft, assault, burglary and homicides have declined at Concordia Place since A-Alert started in October 2011, but not as much as they’ve gone down in the Calumet District overall, where Concordia Place is located.

One crime is up sharply at Concordia Place since A-Alert was hired: Criminal trespassing complaints, many of them initiated by A-Alert, have skyrocketed at the property from three in 2010 to 29 in 2014.

Banning residents’ loved ones or—worse—having them criminally charged, has had a profound impact on their lives. Godfrey, who doesn’t have a car, now relies on friends and family for transportation to doctor’s appointments, to pick up her kids from school and to go to the grocery store. She has missed several doctors’ appointments because she couldn’t find someone to give her a ride, she said. Some friends and family members say they avoid going to Concordia Place because of concerns about being harassed, barred or charged with trespassing.

Crime at Concordia

Index crimes, which are used by the FBI to track the overall crime rate, fell less at Concordia in the three years A-Alert has worked there than they did in the rest of the Calumet District, where the complex is located.



Note: Index crimes include various types of theft, burglary, assault, rape and homicide. Used three-year averages to minimize the effect of outlier years.

Source: Chicago Police Department; analyzed by The Chicago Reporter

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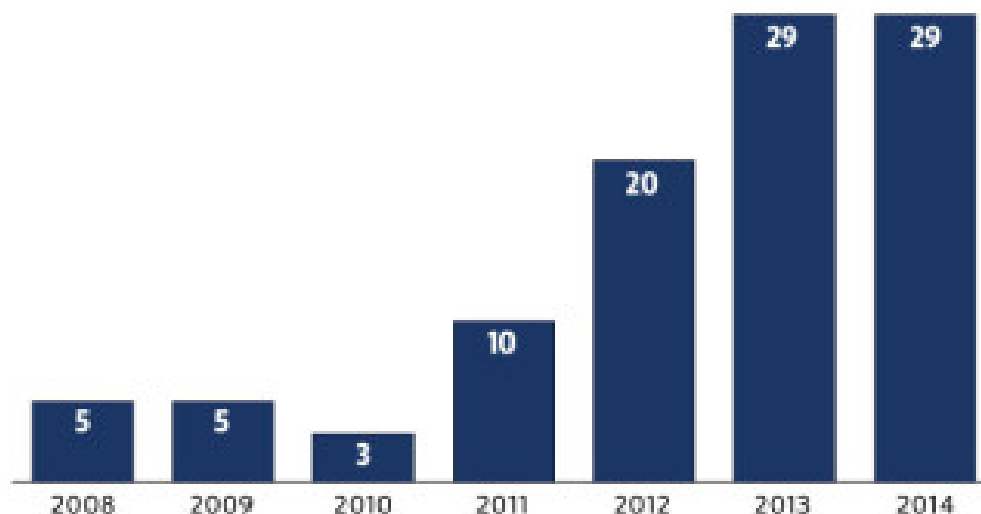
<http://chicagoreporter.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/files/2015/09/Concordia2.1.jpg>

Graphic by Christine Wachter

Index crimes dropped less from 2008-10 to 2012-14 at Concordia Place than in the Calumet District. (Click to enlarge)

Trespassing calls up

The number criminal trespassing crimes reported at Concordia Place jumped tenfold from 2010, the year before A-Alert began patrolling, to 2014.



Source: Chicago Police Department.

<http://chicagoreporter.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/files/2015/09/Concordia1-narrow2.jpg>

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Graphic by Christine Wachter

Number of criminal trespass crimes reported by year at Concordia Place Apartments. (Click to enlarge)

“We keep people out, we’re not disputing that,” Egidi said. “I’m not there, but the guards are there, and there’s a reason for it. They’re not keeping them out because they want to come in and pray.”

Seventy-five residents signed a petition last summer asking Promex Midwest, the complex’s management company, to fire A-Alert.

“A-Alert treats us with no dignity or respect. For example referring to female tenants as black bitches and crack head whores, and referring to our children as retards,” the residents wrote in their petition. “We have now become afraid for our lives and our children’s lives. We refuse to see another Tra[y]von Martin situation!!! This kind of treatment is inhumane and will no longer be tolerated!”

They said they received no response.

“A big huge mess”

Incidents between A-Alert guards and residents can quickly dissolve into a game of he said-she said. In documents obtained by The Reporter, Martinez and Promex have painted residents as aggressors and instigators.

Take one example from the Saturday before Easter. A resident had a party that, her neighbors say, was so quiet that other residents in the building didn’t even know it was going on. Most of the visitors were elderly family members. A-Alert guards saw an unusually large number of cars in the parking lot and tried to figure out where the gathering was, said Yolanda Walker, a neighbor.

“The next thing we know, all of his guys start rushing up the stairs, dragging people, slamming people [into the bannisters],” said Walker, president of the tenant’s association.

“A woman had to be taken out in an ambulance, people were crying, it was a big huge mess,” Walker said. “And with all of that, there was not one arrest.”

Sarah Lampel, director of operations and compliance for Promex Midwest, told an entirely different story in an email to Qwanchaize Edwards, director of legislative affairs and communications for 9th ward Ald. Anthony Beale, who had reached out to management on behalf of the tenants.

She said close to 100 people were at the party, and many were drinking outside. When security “respectfully” reminded them of the rules against drinking in common areas, she wrote, “They became extremely aggressive towards security, behavior which including cursing, threats of violence and physically charging at the security officers.”

She said the incident was “a perfect example of why we are not only grateful for A-Alert as our security company, but also for the way they conduct themselves on the property.”

“As you receive calls from residents, please keep in mind you are receiving only half of a story,” she told Edwards.

Martinez’s accounts of such incidents sometimes shift.

His version of what happened on a crisp night in May 2014 changed several times, according to court records. What is indisputable is that Martinez and another guard saw two teenagers walking on Concordia Place grounds. When the teens saw security coming, they ran. Martinez and his partner chased after Denon Oglesby, a 19-year-old Concordia resident, in their SUV, before catching him and handcuffing him.

According to the police report, Martinez told CPD officers that he saw Oglesby look in his direction and then run, holding his side as if he had a weapon, and then drop a gun on the ground. Martinez’s written report, which A-Alert guards are required to make of every incident, made no mention of the teenager holding his side, according to court testimony.

Then, in a preliminary court hearing, Martinez said that Oglesby “reached into his pants, took out what I saw to be a firearm, and threw it on the ground.”

But when he testified at Oglesby’s trial, he said the teenager threw something against the wall of a building, which made a loud sound like metal hitting brick. At the time he couldn’t see what the object was, he said.

Oglesby was charged with six counts of aggravated unlawful use of a weapon, a felony. After hearing Martinez’s testimony, a Cook County judge found Oglesby not guilty on all six counts based on his conclusion that the prosecution presented insufficient evidence.



http://chicagoreporter.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/files/2015/09/080615_ConcordiaPlace_MH_02.jpg

Photo by Max Herman

A view of Concordia Place Apartments in Riverdale.

The man behind A-Alert

Martinez is at the center of most disputes involving A-Alert.

He dreamed of becoming a police officer since he was a teenager.

Soon after he came to the United States at age 17 from his native Morocco in 1988, he began working toward that goal. (He changed his name from Zouheir Rahmani when he became a U.S. citizen in 2001.) Starting around 1994, he applied at least eight times to at least five different police departments, including Houston, Los Angeles, Bridgeview and Chicago. He applied three times to the Chicago Police Department between 1999 and 2006.

“I think I have a lot to offer to Chicago Police Department,” he said in February 2009, after he had been rejected from CPD for the third time. “I’m not the best, but I know if I get good training, I can become the best.”

He was rejected based on several marks on his record, including his 1991 arrest for aggravated assault for allegedly trying to hit a traffic aide with his taxi. He was sentenced to court supervision.

He sued the department, alleging that he was discriminated against because he is Muslim and Arab. A federal judge ruled in favor of CPD after finding that Martinez failed to present evidence of discrimination.

In March 2003, Martinez began work as a part-time security guard and supervisor for A-Alert II Security-N-Guard Services, according to his CPD application. One of his supervisory responsibilities was to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation.

But he didn't receive his state license or firearm training until 2005, according to state records.

In January 2004, A-Alert was placed on probation and fined \$750 by IDFPD for employing nine people who did not have active state licenses, including one person who had never applied for one.

By September 2011, records show, Martinez had taken over A-Alert II and changed the name to A-Alert Security Services, Inc. That month, Martinez signed a security guard services contract with Concordia Place as A-Alert's president. By signing the contract, Martinez represented that A-Alert was "fully licensed and authorized to provide all of the services required of it."

The problem is that Martinez didn't receive his state private security contractor license, which permits a licensed security guard with at least three years of experience to run a security guard agency, until April 2012, state records show. Moreover, A-Alert Security Services, which also goes by the name A-Alert Security and Investigations, wasn't licensed as its own private security agency until May 2012.

Private security, public housing

State regulation of the private security industry is minimal. A licensed armed security guard in Illinois has to submit to a background check and go through just 40 hours of training: 20 hours of basic instruction and 20 hours of firearms training. The basic instruction includes information on use of force, arrest techniques, civil and criminal laws for private security guards and fire prevention.

The ranks of private security companies are growing rapidly. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were nearly 980,000 private security guards in the U.S. in 2014, or about three private guards for every two federal, state and local law enforcement officers.

"The phenomenon of privatization is an unstoppable train," said Charles Nemeth, an expert in private security who chairs the department of Security, Fire and Emergency Management at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York. "The public sector is contracting and the private sector is expanding."

One area ripe for private security is public and subsidized housing, Nemeth said.

"That was one of the earliest entry points for the private security companies," he said. "You know why they are in low-income housing developments? Because the housing police were pathetically terrible, they have never done a good job."

The Chicago Housing Authority Police Department was disbanded in 1999. Most public and subsidized housing developments in Chicago now have private security companies, and many of them have serious problems, according to housing advocates.

"I think there's no one good security company," said Kate Walz, director of housing justice at the Shriver National Center on Poverty Law in Chicago. "It's just a choice of evils."

Most of the complaints she hears from tenants at subsidized housing developments are that security is too lax and ineffective.

One of the problems, experts say, is that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development doesn't monitor subcontractors at developments where they subsidize rents. HUD did not respond to questions about the amount of the contract at Concordia Place.

HUD's Real Estate Assessment Center conducts inspections of properties every three years, or more regularly if problems are found. Inspectors look only at physical issues like plumbing, insects and garbage disposal. They don't evaluate security companies or their practices.

Residents say Martinez and his company have turned Concordia Place into a de-facto prison.

"I feel like a target, an inmate," Godfrey said.

These days, she rarely stays at Concordia Place. She and her kids have been staying with her boyfriend or with relatives, sometimes sleeping on a couch or the floor.

"I feel so trapped when I go there," she said. "I'd just rather not be home."

This story has been updated.

Are you or someone you know experiencing problems with a security company at a local public housing complex? If so, contact reporter Jonah Newman at jnewman@chicagoreporter.com.

HUD orders Chicago housing complex to correct security problems

By Jonah Newman | September 30, 2015



Photo by Max Herman

A view of Concordia Place Apartments in the Riverdale neighborhood on Chicago's Far South Side.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has ordered the owner of a Far South Side apartment complex where residents say they were harassed by the security company to submit a plan to correct the problem following a Reporter [investigation](http://chicagoreporter.com/section-8-residents-feel-terrorized-by-private-security-company/) (<http://chicagoreporter.com/section-8-residents-feel-terrorized-by-private-security-company/>).

It's not clear what the plan entails. A spokesman for HUD would not elaborate on what steps the agency might take after evaluating the plan, which is due today.

Housing experts say it is rare for HUD to order corrective action plans. Among the steps the agency could take include asking the owner to terminate the contract with the security company, A-Alert Security and Investigations.

Residents at Concordia Place Apartments said A-Alert Security regularly harasses visitors and has them arrested by Chicago police, uses profanities and excessive force, and patrols the property with assault rifles and a German Shepherd named "Demon," who has bitten at least one person, who had to be taken to the hospital.

In April 2015, 26 African-American residents and guests filed a federal lawsuit against security company owner Ricky Martinez, A-Alert, and DRE, Inc., which owns both the property and the management company, Promex Midwest. Two former residents have filed separate lawsuits.

The owner of Concordia Place, Dennis Egidi, declined to comment on what corrective action the company may take. But residents say they have already noticed an about-face in the way A-Alert and owner Ricky Martinez police Concordia.

“We rarely see them anymore,” Yolanda Walker, president of the Concordia Place tenants association, said this week. “You don’t see the dog, you don’t see the high-powered rifles, and you definitely don’t see Martinez. So they have slowed down.”

Still, some housing experts said HUD could have acted sooner to investigate complaints about the tactics employed by the security company at Concordia Place. They said the agency should do a better job monitoring subcontracts at its approximately 23,000 subsidized multi-family housing developments nationwide.

HUD does not review or approve subcontractors at the multifamily projects they subsidize. Owners and management companies must submit information to HUD showing that they have “business integrity, honesty and capacity to perform,” according to HUD regulations. But no such evaluation is conducted for security companies and other subcontractors.

If so, HUD might have discovered, as The Reporter did, that A-Alert Security didn’t have the correct state license—and neither did its owner Ricky Martinez—when he signed a security services contract with Concordia Place in Sept. 2011.

“What’s happening [at Concordia Place] is not surprising at all to me, and it shouldn’t be surprising to anyone else,” said Kate Walz, director of housing justice at the Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, which represents the Concordia Place tenants association. “HUD needs to do a better job of screening who these management agents are and who the security companies are before they let the owner enter into contracts with them.”

But Carol Galante, who served as HUD’s Deputy Assistant Secretary for Multifamily Housing Programs from 2009 to 2011, said the agency is too large to get into the business of monitoring subcontracts.

“It’s a huge government agency that can’t be in a position—and doesn’t have the resources—to micromanage,” said Galante, who also served as the Federal Housing Commissioner and now teaches at the University of California at Berkeley.

In fact, HUD doesn’t even directly oversee most of its subsidized multifamily housing stock. Instead, it subcontracts that oversight role to outside companies, known as Performance-Based Contract Administrators.

Those contract administrators are responsible for fielding and responding to tenant complaints, facilitating the payment of rent subsidies and conducting regular reviews of management companies.

Housing advocates said this set up keeps HUD too far removed from problems facing tenants in properties like Concordia Place, even though HUD pays its owner \$3.2 million each year in rent subsidies.

“HUD would say, take those problems to the contract administrator,” said James Grow, Deputy Director of the San Francisco-based National Housing Law Project. “But tenants don’t always know who the contract administrator is. So, in some ways, it’s disingenuous for HUD to say this without a much more robust information campaign [for residents].”

Contract administrators also are not directly accountable to the public. The Atlanta-based non-profit National Housing Compliance, Inc., which is the contract administrator for most HUD Section 8 contracts in Georgia and Illinois including Concordia Place, referred The Reporter’s questions about the issues at the property to HUD’s regional office in Chicago. HUD has not yet responded to a public records request, submitted nine weeks ago, for documentation of the management reviews that National Housing Compliance is supposed to conduct at Concordia Place.

It’s not entirely clear if NHC, Inc. overlooked complaints from residents at Concordia Place about A-Alert, or if residents didn’t know to direct their complaints to NHC, Inc.

Either way, security concerns are particularly difficult to address in subsidized housing, Walz said, because HUD does not require owners to provide security and doesn’t have guidelines for what constitutes good or bad security. More guidance from HUD could help owners, tenants and advocates better understand and agree on the role of security at these developments, she said.

Galante countered that security at each development is different, making it an area that HUD shouldn't try to regulate.

"I think you really want to be careful not to tie the hands of owners of these properties to get things done," she said.

Advocates said the lack of direction from HUD, coupled with the agency's lax oversight of security subcontractors, means that even if HUD demands that Concordia Place terminate their contract with A-Alert as part of the corrective action, A-Alert could still receive contracts at other HUD properties.

"I think that scenario is not only possible," Walz said, "but it has happened" with other companies.

Chicago housing complex agrees to fire security firm accused of harassment

By **Jonah Newman** | October 8, 2015



Photo by Max Herman

A private security company at Concordia Place Apartments, a 297-unit federally subsidized housing development in Chicago's Riverdale neighborhood, was the focus of an investigation by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The owner of a subsidized housing complex on the Far South Side has agreed to terminate a contract with a private security company after [The Chicago Reporter investigated](http://chicagoreporter.com/section-8-residents-feel-terrorized-by-private-security-company/) allegations that the company abused and harassed residents.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in Chicago asked Dennis Egidi, principal owner of Concordia Place Apartments, to end the contract after investigating residents' complaints against A-Alert Security and Investigations. Last week, Egidi told a HUD official that he would fire the company, according to an email provided to the Reporter by the federal housing agency.

A-Alert can still do business with other HUD properties.

Egidi told the Reporter he's not firing the security firm because of the company's job performance at Concordia Place. He's taking the action, he said, because the HUD official suggested it.

“There’s no reason to fire them because they were only doing their job and they were doing a good job,” he said.

In interviews and a federal lawsuit, residents at Concordia Place alleged that A-Alert guards patrolled the property carrying assault rifles, used profanity and excessive force, and banned their relatives and friends from the property without cause.

Egidi said he informed A-Alert owner Ricky Martinez of the termination on Monday. Under the terms of the contract, A-Alert must be given at least 60 days notice before the contract officially ends.

Martinez referred questions to his lawyer, who had no comment because he was unaware of the decision.

In April, 26 African-American residents and guests filed a federal lawsuit against Martinez, A-Alert, and DRE, Inc., which owns both the property and the management company, Promex Midwest. Two former residents have filed separate lawsuits.

Several residents contacted by the Reporter on Thursday said they were pleased to hear that the A-Alert contract was being terminated.

“You have given me some wonderful news,” said Sheena Godfrey, one of the tenants who had signed on to a lawsuit against Concordia Place and A-Alert. “I feel so relieved.”

Godfrey left the hospital Wednesday after giving birth to a healthy baby girl. But she hasn’t returned to Concordia Place because the baby’s father has been unjustly barred from the property, she says. Godfrey relies on him for transportation and other help.

Yolanda Walker, president of the Concordia Place tenants association, said she plans to organize quickly to ensure that the company hired to replace A-Alert will be more responsive to residents.

Egidi said he will begin to interview new security companies within three to four weeks, but made it clear that residents would have no say in the selection.

“It’s not their decision,” he said. “It’s got nothing to do with them.”

HUD will have a say. Officials have asked Egidi to provide copies of state licenses for any company it plans to hire and each of its employees.

The federal housing agency also asked Concordia Place to review its house rules, in particular one that prohibits residents from recording security officers with cell phones or cameras. According to HUD guidelines, house rules cannot “infringe on tenants’ civil rights.”

Some housing experts said HUD could have acted sooner to investigate complaints about the tactics employed by the security company at Concordia Place. They said the agency should do a better job monitoring subcontracts at its approximately 23,000 subsidized multi-family housing developments nationwide.

HUD does not review or approve subcontractors at the multifamily projects they subsidize. Owners and management companies must submit information to HUD showing that they have “business integrity, honesty and capacity to perform,” according to agency regulations. But no such evaluation is conducted for security companies and other subcontractors.

The requests from HUD to Concordia Place do not affect A-Alert’s other contracts or prevent the company from getting new business in federally subsidized housing. The company has at least one other contract at a HUD-subsidized development in the Chicago area.

Kate Walz said the housing agency should more closely scrutinize companies like A-Alert that have a history of problems and review their contracts at other apartment complexes.

However, a former HUD official recently told the Reporter (<http://chicagoreporter.com/hud-orders-chicago-housing-complex-to-correct-security-problems/>) that the federal housing agency does not have the resources to inspect every security contract.

“I think that could be a missed opportunity,” said Walz, director of housing justice at the Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, referring to the other complexes where A-Alert works. “Tenants there may not know who to complain to, or may be too afraid to complain. Especially given the stories coming out of Concordia, they may have reason to be.”