

The Sharing Economy and Discrimination: Part Deux

Insights

8.08.17

In a follow-up to [our discussion earlier this summer regarding discrimination and the sharing economy](#), the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) [recently settled a charge of discrimination](#) with a sharing economy rental market host who allegedly made disparaging racial comments and canceled a guest's reservations as the guest was traveling to the property in a snowstorm.

In February 2017, Dyne Suh, along with her fiancé and two friends, was traveling to Tami Barker's cabin in Big Bear, California when she received a text from Ms. Barker saying "I wouldn't rent to u if u were the last person on earth" ... One word says it all. Asian." Ms. Suh subsequently complained to DFEH. Following negotiations with DFEH, Ms. Baker agreed to make a personal apology to Ms. Suh, and promised to participate in a community education panel, to comply with anti-discrimination laws, to complete 25 hours of community service with a civil rights organization, and to report rental data to DFEH for a four-year period. Perhaps more interestingly, Ms. Baker also agreed to take a college-level Asian-American studies class within a year of the agreement.

The digital sharing economy platform that connected the host with the renter – Airbnb – [called Ms. Barker's behavior "abhorrent and unacceptable"](#) after it learned of the incident, and permanently removed Ms. Barker from its platform. Meanwhile, potential competitors to the company have cropped up to provide alternatives. For example, Noirebnb, Noirbnb, and Inclusive are sites developed within the past year to cater to African-Americans looking for temporary accommodation. Accomable is a site which claims to have over 1100 accessible properties for disabled renters, and Misterbnb, which bills itself as a gay-friendly site, are just a few of the many alternatives for travelers.

Although DFEH is a state agency operating only in California, its move to investigate sharing-economy businesses such as Airbnb undoubtedly has implications for other sharing-economy businesses in the state, and potentially for sharing economy businesses around the country, as other states look to California's efforts to address allegations of bias.

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