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Springfield Tenants Unite held a rally on the steps of the Historic Greene County Courthouse announcing a lawsuit against multiple Springfield property companies on May 28. PHOTOS BY NATHAN PAPES/SPRINGFIELD NEWS-LEADER

‘We stay together as a community’

Tenants sue to keep apartments in tax credit program

Hope Davis
Special to the News-Leader
USA TODAY NETWORK

Residents of two Springfield affordable apartment complexes took legal action Tuesday, May 27 in an effort to stay in their homes and stop changes pursued by current and previous landlords. Their fight has implications for affordable housing nationwide.

Tenants from Cedarwood Terrace and Rosewood Estates filed two lawsuits May 27 over the handling of low income housing tax credits (LIHTC) that supported affordable housing. The first case is a class-action suit to keep the properties in the tax credit program past 2026, while the second

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Springfield Tenants Unite held a rally on the steps of the Historic Greene County Courthouse announcing a lawsuit against multiple Springfield property companies on May 28.

CHRISTIAN COUNTY LIBRARY Board selects new executive director

Marta Mieze
Springfield News-Leader
USA TODAY NETWORK

Christian County Library will soon have a permanent executive director again. After a months-long search, the Board of Trustees has hired Will Blydenburgh, a librarian in Florida, for the top district job.

Board President Echo Schneider announced the selection at the Tuesday, May 27, board meeting. Some members of the audience responded to the announcement with applause.

The board voted to extend an official offer to Blydenburgh at a May 9 closed meeting. The offer included pay at \$42 per hour, with up to \$6,000 in reimbursable relocation costs, upon submission of receipts, according to the motion obtained by the News-Leader through the Sunshine Law. The vote was unanimous and set the start date on July 14. The offer is still contingent upon Blydenburgh passing a background check which the library is still awaiting as of May 28 afternoon.

This sets the pay for Blydenburgh higher than what former executive director Renee Brumett, who had held the position for three and a half years, was making when she resigned in mid-January. The \$42 per hour rate is also toward the upper end of the range for the position the board approved during the hiring process at its Jan. 31 board meeting, which was \$38-\$43 per hour or about \$79,040-\$87,360 a year, with an additional benefits package that would add roughly \$24,000 in total compensation. This was an increase from the salary range for the position the board approved at the end of 2024 when setting the budget. Brumett’s salary was going to be set at \$40.55 per hour or \$84,344 annually for 2025.

Who is Will Blydenburgh?

Blydenburgh is the principal librarian, or essentially a branch manager, at

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GOP senators balk at Trump tax bill

Riley Beggin
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – President Donald Trump is hoping to celebrate a major legislative win this summer by signing into law a massive bill with implications for every American, including extending tax cuts from his first term and following through on a campaign pledge to eliminate taxes on tips and overtime.

But to do that, Trump will need to convince a handful of vocal members of his own party in the Senate who want major changes to the bill that passed the House on May 22.

The upper chamber will soon begin

working on the legislation that would extend income tax cuts, implement changes to Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, funnel more money toward immigration enforcement and more. Their goal is to pass it by July 4.

The Senate isn’t likely to take the House’s version as is – and some senators are already drawing red lines. All eyes will be on Republican Sens. Josh Hawley of Missouri, Susan Collins of Maine, Rick Scott of Florida and Ron Johnson of Wisconsin – among others – who are pushing for changes to the bill’s approach to Medicaid, green energy subsidies and overall spending.

“The goal of the House effort has been to pass one big, beautiful bill. It’s rhetoric, it’s false advertising,” Johnson said on May 22, hours after the House bill passed. “The goal should have been (to) reduce average annual deficits. We have to focus on spending.”

Trump has encouraged senators to make changes – which, he said, “may be something I’d agree with” – despite House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-Louisiana, urging senators “not to meddle with it too much” to make it possible to pass it again through the House.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune,

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Some Republican senators are already drawing red lines on the tax bill, such as Sens. Josh Hawley of Missouri, back right, and Susan Collins of Maine. Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, center, has raised concerns that the bill raises the debt ceiling by \$4 trillion.

JACK GRUBER/USA TODAY FILE



Lawsuits

Continued from Page 1A

seeks damages for tenants who moved out due to notices to vacate they argue were illegitimate.

With the support of Springfield Tenants Unite and the Heartland Center for Jobs and Freedom, the Rosewood-Cedarwood Tenants Union claims the properties' former owner, Zimmerman Properties, violated the law by not notifying tenants as they sought to opt out of the LIHTC program. Tenants say they did not know their subsidies were at risk until new owners tried to convert the properties to market rate.

Defendants in the suits also include Bryan Properties, GPS Property Management, the Missouri Housing Development Commission and the complexes' new owners, developers Mitchell and Amanda Jenkins. The News-Leader reached out to the defendants but did not hear before deadline.

Members of the Rosewood-Cedarwood Tenants Union say the lawsuits are part of a fight to maintain the communities and quality of life they've found in their homes. Many of the tenants are seniors, working families, and people with disabilities who found community in their affordable housing.

"What does winning in court mean for us? It means we stay together as a community," Rosewood tenant Ramona Teeter said at a Wednesday, May 28 news conference announcing the lawsuits. "It means seniors can retire in peace. It means people with disabilities can live (full) lives and hard-working families can raise their kids with hope and promise."

These cases are also significant for the state of affordable housing. Across the state and country, thousands of units supported by LIHTC could increase in price in the next five years as tax credits expire and owners opt out of the program.

Gina Chiala, executive director of the Heartland Center, told the News-Leader the two Springfield cases demonstrate a lack of oversight policing how properties opt out.

What's in the Springfield tenants' lawsuit?

According to the class-action lawsuit, Zimmerman properties sought to



Emily Hester, with the Rosewood-Cedarwood Tenant Union, speaks at a rally on the steps of the Historic Greene County Courthouse announcing a lawsuit against multiple Springfield property companies on May 28. PHOTOS BY NATHAN PAPES/SPRINGFIELD NEWS-LEADER

opt out of the LIHTC program in 2022 and did not notify tenants as required by law. In letters from property management obtained by the News-Leader, tenants learned the properties were under contract with new owners in January 2024 but were assured their housing subsidies were safe.

That spring, Cedarwood tenants received notices to vacate and Rosewood tenants who tried to renew their leases say they were offered month-to-month agreements. Property owners later rescinded these notices, as they could not raise rents to market rate until 2026.

The class-action lawsuit claims that tenants received letters last July stating that in 2026 Rosewood would be converted to luxury apartments for renters over 55 and Cedarwood units would be sold as individual townhomes for purchase.

Four tenants who left as a result of the notices or new leases filed the second May 27 lawsuit, which seeks damages for the cost incurred and stress of moving and losing their communities. According to emails shared with the News-Leader, property owner Mitchell Jenkins agreed to reimburse tenants up to \$800 for moving costs or \$150 for application fees in search of a new home



Ramona Teeter, with the Rosewood-Cedarwood Tenant Union, speaks at a rally on the steps of the Historic Greene County Courthouse.

after negotiations with the tenants' union. Plaintiffs in this second lawsuit said they gave up community and features that allowed them to live independently with disabilities.

With support from Springfield Tenants Unite, tenants continued organizing in late 2024 and engaged in negotiations with the property owners. They started working with the Heartland Center, a Kansas City legal group that represents workers and tenants. Along the way, they noticed an addendum in their lease agreements outlining some of their rights under LIHTC.

The addendum states that "the owner is required to provide notice to the resident of their intent to Opt-Out." After that point, the property must remain affordable for three years. Because residents did not receive notice of this intent, the lawsuits argue Rosewood and Cedarwood should be placed back in the LIHTC program.

At a May 28 press conference, Chiala noted that with proper notification, tenants would have had an opportunity to find affordable housing or object to the properties being sold to for-profit developers and converted to luxury housing.

Maintaining housing accessibility

Many Rosewood and Cedarwood residents are people with disabilities or seniors who planned to stay in their homes for the rest of their lives. Tenants said that outside these properties, they could not find safe, affordable homes that accommodate their disabilities or families.

Cedarwood tenant and single mom Shellastine Williams said she had to cancel her plans to enter nursing school because paying for a move meant she couldn't afford classes. Other apartments she could afford were in poor condition and in neighborhoods where she didn't feel safe leaving her daughters while she worked overnight.

Teresa Myers, a plaintiff in the second lawsuit, moved out of Rosewood last year after management gave her a month-to-month lease. As a deaf-blind person, Rosewood was ideal for Myers. The one-level homes in east Springfield, near a paved nature trail, allowed her to garden and get around safely with her guide dog. She made friends with blind neighbors and shared paratransit rides.

Now, Myers said she lives next to a busy street with limited sidewalks. She's lost the mental health benefits of walking, gardening, and being close to friends.

Rosewood is also home to 14 residents with severe disabilities who share 24-hour caregivers across seven units, according to the lawsuit.

Loss of LIHTC affordable housing

Properties made affordable with low



Teresa Myers, with the Rosewood-Cedarwood Tenant Union, speaks at a rally.

income housing tax credits make up the largest share of federally-subsidized housing, according to data from the National Low Income Housing Coalition and the Public and Affordable Housing Research Corporation. These tax credits expire, which sets the properties back to the market rate.

The same data estimates about 200,000 rental properties across the U.S. will lose these tax credits in the next five years, further reducing access to affordable housing. A press release from the Heartland Center claims 10% of Missouri's federally supported housing will expire in that time.

While the tax credits last 30 years, developers can opt-out of the program after 15 years through specific processes. Libby O'Neill, senior policy analyst at the National Low Income Housing Coalition, told the News-Leader that many states — including Missouri — now require that new properties entering the program waive this right to opt out. These waivers keep new properties from returning to market rate after 15 years, but do not cover older developments like Rosewood and Cedarwood.

Chiala said it seems like companies are not policed when they opt out of LIHTC after 15 years and that properties leaving the program illegally might be more common than many realize.

"It just so happens that these tenants were particularly strong and organized and they figured out that their rights had been violated and reached out to us," Chiala said. "Which really just makes me wonder, 'how common is this?'"

She added that the Heartland Center wants to be a "watchful eye" for LIHTC tenants in Missouri.

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