

DAILY NEWS

Tenant balks at doggie ban

BY RICHARD WEIR
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

A DWARF WHO says she needs her dog for emotional support is suing two Long Island housing complexes for banning her because of their no-pets policies.

Barbara Echeverria, 57, argues in her \$20 million lawsuit that the two private apartment developments for senior citizens violated federal fair housing laws by reneging on agreements to rent her an apartment after learning of her miniature schnauzer, Rascal.

"Both of these housing developments told her point-blank, 'No pets.' She said, 'This is not a pet. Here's the doctor note. Here's the proof,'" Echeverria's lawyer, Frederick Brewington, said yesterday.

A note by the Deer Park woman's personal physician, Dr. Steven Goldman of Huntington, backed her contention that she depends on her 28-pound pooch to calm her nerves.

"Barbara Echeverria has made it very clear that she is going to stand — and she is going to stand tall — for the rights of those who have been abused," Brewington said.

Echeverria first sought to live at Babylon Park Center in Deer Park, but officials there told her in January 2005, "Absolutely, positively no dog," according to the suit, filed Tuesday in Islip Federal Court.

Echeverria, an unemployed telephone customer service rep, then went to Krystie Manor in Amityville, which also yanked her lease after being told of her dog, she said.

"I need him. Especially since my husband's passed, he's my emotional support," Echeverria said.

Though she measures 47 inches tall, kyphoscoliosis has contorted her spine, making her not much taller than 3 feet. She also suffers from arthritis and walks with a cane.

Rascal, she said, helps her pick up objects she's dropped. But most importantly, she said, the dog helps her endure the hardships of dwarfism, which left her with shortened limbs.

"When I'm petting him, I can actually feel my body relax," she said.

The owners of Krystie Manor did not return a call for comment. But a lawyer for Babylon Park Center defended the decision not to rent to Echeverria and said a poll of the complex's residents found that 73% didn't want any exceptions to the no-pets rule.

"They basically said, 'This is a no pet facility. We all signed on for that. That's why we moved here,'" said lawyer Jeffrey Siler.

rweir@nydailynews.com



Barbara Echeverria, 57, walks her miniature schnauzer Rascal, with her lawyer, Frederick Brewington.

RICHARD SLATTERY