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Woods, a Two-Time Award Recipient, Wins Against Slumlords

On June 17, Musick Peeler Partner Daniel J. Woods will receive the Inner City Law Center's (ICLC) Katharine Krause Award for many years of volunteer and pro bono work, which include a recent, published decision that marked a major victory against a deplorable slumlord.

"This was the first published decision Inner City had ever obtained for its clients, and it and other nonprofits have used it since to assist them in valuing cases and obtaining better settlements," said Woods, who also won the Krause award in 2000 and who has been on the ICLC's Board of Directors for 20 years, five years as its President. Woods is best known for winning a federal court trial resulting in a judgment that the military's, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy was unconstitutional, after a seven-year battle (also pro bono).

The slumlord decision, published in October by the 2nd District state Court of Appeal in William Garcia v Reijo Myllyla (B292322), upholds an award for nine tenants in an illegally converted, severely dilapidated Los Angeles duplex overrun by rats, bedbugs and roaches – one of which was removed from a tenant's ear. A jury sided with plaintiff claims including premises liability, negligent failure to provide habitable premises and intentional infliction of emotional distress and awarded up to $15,000 plus $95,000 in punitive damages per plaintiff.

Myllyla appealed, complaining that plaintiffs failed to produce sufficient evidence of their emotional distress and of his financial condition to support the punitive damage awards. The appellate court affirmed the judgment, finding, among other things, that, because the defendant failed to comply with the trial court's order to produce evidence of his net worth, he could not complain that the awards were out of proportion to whatever his net worth might be.

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