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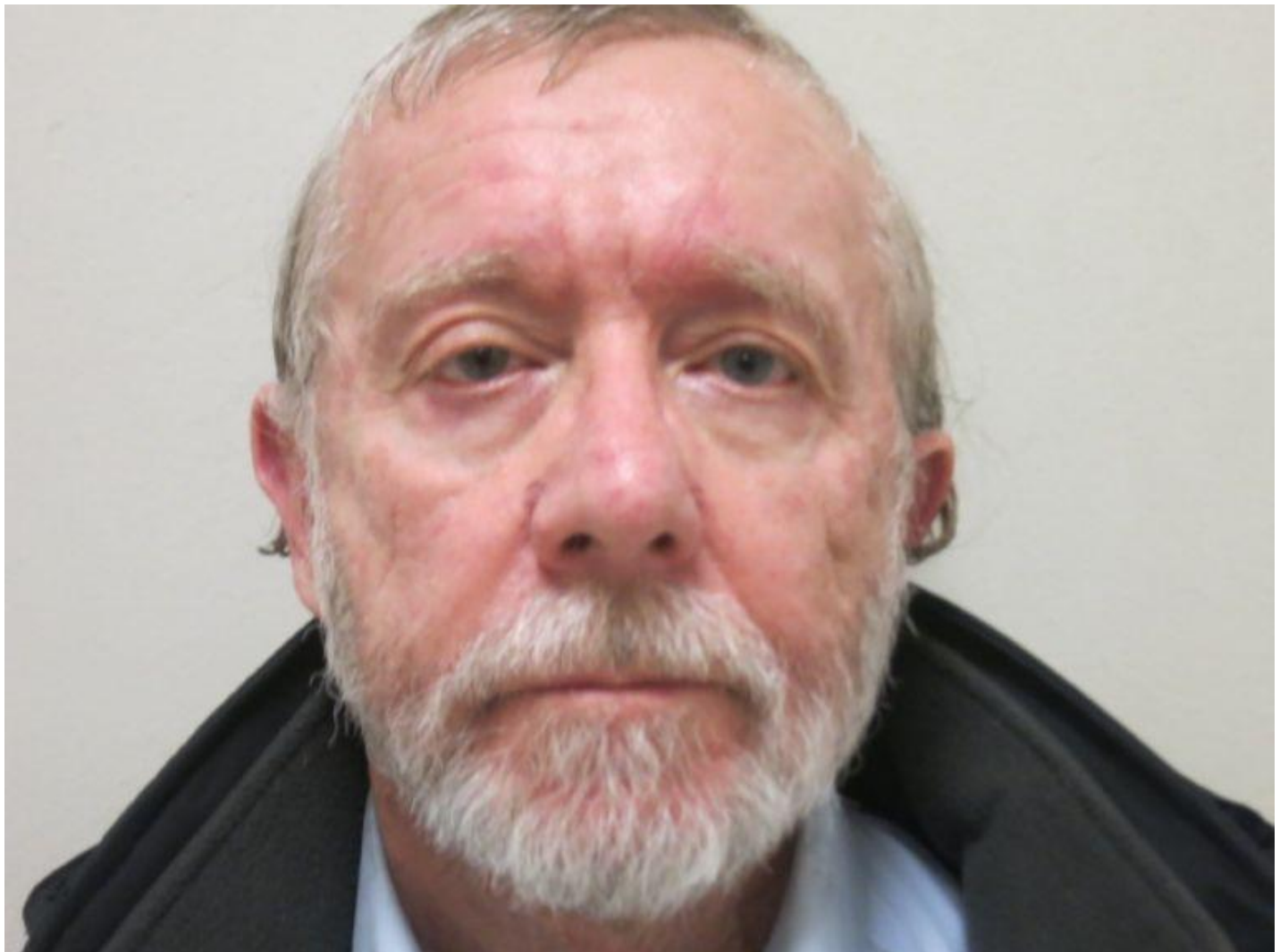
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Jewish landlord sentenced for double-dipping in Maple Heights

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Alex Hoffman

Photo / Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority Police Department

A Jewish landlord who evicted a veteran from an apartment in Maple Heights continued to collect the man's public housing voucher as well as rent money from a new tenant who moved into the same unit.

"He was double-dipping on the property," said Joe Frolik, spokesman for the Cuyahoga County prosecutor's office.

Alex Hoffman, 66, of Cleveland Heights was sentenced to house arrest, a two-year suspended prison sentence and five years of probation June 7.

He had pleaded guilty to one count of aggravated theft and four counts of disseminating material harmful to minors. The latter charge was a result of internet files containing what appeared to be child pornography that were found on his computer.

On June 7, Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Judge Daniel Gaul ordered Hoffman to sell his 40-unit apartment complex in Maple Heights, and he is never allowed to rent out an apartment again.

Hoffman's sentence also included \$12,500 in fines – \$2,500 for each of the five counts to which he pleaded guilty – and \$5,000 in restitution to the Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority, which issued the housing voucher. He is also required to sell the apartment complex to someone he is not related to and has no prior business dealings with, and he can accept no further payment for governmental properties.

Michael Bell, the veteran, moved into an apartment in Hoffman's Maple Heights complex in 2012, according to Frolik. In 2014, Hoffman told Bell his unit had failed to pass inspection and he was ordered to move out, Frolik said.

Bell ended up at a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs shelter for homeless veterans, and the VA tried to get him back into housing, Frolik said.

Sometime last year, Hoffman told Bell that his housing voucher from the CMHA was revoked, but it was not. Hoffman continued to collect about \$5,000 from the housing authority.

"The CMHA was paying on the housing voucher, but (Bell) wasn't living in the place, and Hoffman didn't tell the CMHA that he was no longer a tenant," Frolik said.

Meanwhile, Hoffman rented the unit to a new tenant. Last summer, after CMHA had scheduled its annual inspection of the unit, Hoffman told the new tenant to lie to CMHA housing inspectors when they arrived and say she was Bell's friend, said Lt. Gregory Drew of the CMHA Police Department.

The woman told CMHA inspectors she had been living in the apartment for several months and didn't know Bell, Drew said. CMHA police were then notified, and Hoffman was arrested.

Hoffman was indicted last August on charges of theft and aggravated theft. During his arrest, police seized his computer and authorities found temporary internet files and deleted files containing what appeared to be child pornography.

But prosecutors found no evidence that Hoffman shared any child pornography images with others, so he was allowed to plead to a lesser charge, which does not have the sex offender designation, Drew said.

The CMHA was able to secure a new voucher for Bell, and he found a home in November, Drew said.

"Once we realized he had lost his voucher, we felt it was important to secure a new voucher for him," Drew said. "He's still an active tenant and is no longer homeless."

Jonathan Greenberg, one of Hoffman's attorneys, did not return a call seeking comment.

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