



# Department of Justice

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## **JUSTICE DEPARTMENT SETTLES ALLEGATIONS OF DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CITY OF SARALAND, ALABAMA**

WASHINGTON – The Justice Department today settled a lawsuit against the city of Saraland, Ala., alleging housing discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

The government’s complaint alleged that the city violated the federal Fair Housing Act when it refused, for explicitly discriminatory reasons, to allow the Lewis Community Care Facility Inc. to open a home for ten mentally disabled adults in a residential neighborhood of the city. These residents were to be screened and referred by the Mobile Mental Health Center and were to share living space and common facilities in a home staffed 24 hours per day and regulated by the state of Alabama.

“Today’s settlement sends a clear message that the rights of persons with disabilities will be vigorously protected in accordance with federal law,” said Wan J. Kim, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. “All Americans, regardless of disability, have a right to fair housing in their communities.”

“It is important for the people of Alabama to know that the civil rights of all our citizens will be protected by the United States Department of Justice, particularly when, as in this case, those individuals are among our most vulnerable,” said Deborah J. Rhodes, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Alabama.

The settlement order, which must be approved by the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Alabama, resolves the government’s case as well as a consolidated lawsuit filed by the Fair Housing Center of Alabama on behalf of Lewis Community Care and its owners, Shannon and Orin Lewis. Under the settlement, the city has agreed to allow the Lewises to operate their home as planned, and to pay \$65,000 in damages and attorneys fees to the Lewises and a civil penalty of \$7,000 to the government. The settlement also mandates that certain city employees undergo training on the requirements of the Fair Housing Act, and that the city maintain records relating to future proposals for housing for disabled persons and submit

periodic reports to the Justice Department.

The case began when the Lewises filed a complaint with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD referred the complaint to the Justice Department, which conducted an investigation and filed suit in May 2005.

The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, familial status, national origin and disability. Since Jan. 1, 2001, the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division has filed 212 cases to enforce the Fair Housing Act, including 97 based on disability discrimination. More information about the Civil Rights Division and the laws it enforces can be found at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt>.

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