



Department of Justice

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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT RESOLVES LAWSUIT ALLEGING RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION BY CITY OF HOLLYWOOD, FLORIDA

WASHINGTON – The Justice Department today announced an agreement to a lawsuit filed by the Department against the City of Hollywood, Fla., resolving allegations that the city violated the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (RLUIPA) by discriminating against the Hollywood Community Synagogue based on its religious denomination, the Chabad Lubavitch movement of Orthodox Judaism.

The settlement agreement, which must still be approved by a federal district judge, resolves the case between the United States and the City of Hollywood, as well as a consolidated lawsuit filed by the Hollywood Community Synagogue against the city and a city commissioner.

“All religious associations must be treated equally and fairly under the law,” said Wan J. Kim, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. “I am pleased that we could reach an agreement with the City of Hollywood that protects and respects the rights of the Chabad to practice its religious beliefs on its property.

The case arose from the city’s handling and ultimate denial of the Hollywood Community Synagogue’s application for a zoning permit to operate a synagogue from two single-family homes in a residential district of the city. According to the government’s complaint, the city routinely grants permits to houses of worship to operate in residential neighborhoods, but denied such a permit to the Hollywood Community Synagogue. The city also allows other religious and non-religious assemblies to operate in residential neighborhoods, but has not taken action against any of them for violating the city’s zoning regulations. The complaint alleges that the differential treatment of the synagogue was due to its religious denomination.

As part of the settlement agreement with the United States, the city agreed to allow the Hollywood Community Synagogue to operate permanently as a house of worship at its properties, and to expand if it should acquire additional properties within a block of its current location. The city also agreed that its leaders and managers, and certain city employees, will attend training on the requirements of RLUIPA. In addition, the city will adopt new complaint procedures, and report periodically to the Justice Department. In a separate agreement, filed with the court at the same time, the city also agreed to pay the Synagogue \$2 million in damages and attorneys fees and costs.

“Today’s agreement makes clear that the Hollywood Community Synagogue has the same rights as other religious associations,” said R. Alexander Acosta, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, who was Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division when the government’s complaint was filed. “In a community as diverse as ours, we must guard against unlawful discrimination. The U.S. Attorney’s Office stands ready to assist in this effort.”

RLUIPA, enacted in 2000, prohibits religious discrimination in land-use and zoning decisions. Since 2001, the Civil Rights Division has reviewed more than 118 cases involving RLUIPA and has opened 26 full investigations. These have included investigations of unequal treatment of Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist houses of worship and religious schools. Most of these have been resolved amicably through voluntary modification of potentially discriminatory zoning regulations.

Individuals who believe that they suffered religious discrimination in land-use or zoning may contact the Housing and Civil Enforcement Section at 1-800-896-7743. Additional information on the Justice Department’s efforts to combat religious discrimination may be found at www.usdoj.gov/crt/religdisc/religionpamp.htm.

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