



Department of Justice

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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT SETTLES ALLEGATIONS OF DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA

WASHINGTON – The Justice Department reached an agreement today with Chapel Hill, N.C., to settle allegations that the city engaged in housing discrimination on the basis of disability.

The government’s complaint alleged that the town violated the federal Fair Housing Act when it refused to grant Sonya Dixon, a citizen of Chapel Hill, a reasonable accommodation for her disabled daughter. Ms. Dixon, then a resident of public housing, had repeatedly requested a reasonable accommodation in the form of a transfer to a wheelchair-accessible unit. The city operates the Chapel Hill Department of Housing, which manages 336 public housing units at 13 sites in Chapel Hill.

“For nearly 20 years, federal law has protected people with disabilities from unlawful discrimination in the housing market,” said Wan J. Kim, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. “The Justice Department is determined to ensure that the fair housing rights of Americans with disabilities are vigorously protected.”

Under the settlement, pending approval by the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of North Carolina, Chapel Hill will pay \$30,000 in damages to the family. The settlement also mandates that town employees undergo training on the requirements of the Fair Housing Act, and that the town adopt a reasonable accommodation policy, post non-discrimination policies, and submit periodic reports to the Justice Department.

The case began when Ms. Dixon filed a fair housing complaint with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). After investigating the matter, HUD issued a charge of discrimination, and the matter was referred to the Justice Department, which filed the lawsuit in December 2005.

“I applaud the Department of Justice’s ongoing commitment to enforcing the Fair Housing Act,” said Kim Kendrick, HUD’s Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity. “No one with a disability should be denied an accommodation they need to maintain their independence.”

Fighting illegal housing discrimination is a top priority of the Justice Department. In February 2006, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales announced Operation Home Sweet Home, a concentrated initiative to expose and eliminate housing discrimination in America. This initiative was inspired by the plight of displaced victims of Hurricane Katrina who were suddenly forced to find new places to live. Operation Home Sweet Home is not limited to the areas hit by Hurricane Katrina and targets housing discrimination across the country.

More information about Operation Home Sweet Home is available at the Justice Department Web site at <http://www.usdoj.gov/fairhousing>. Individuals who believe that they may have been victims of housing discrimination can call our Housing Discrimination tip line (1-800-896-7793), email us at fairhousing@usdoj.gov, or contact the Department of Housing and Urban Development at 1-800-669-9777.

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 219 cases to enforce the Fair Housing Act, 99 of which have alleged discrimination based on disability. More information about the Civil Rights Division and the laws it enforces is available at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt>.

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