



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2007
WWW.USDOJ.GOV

CRT
(202) 514-2007
TDD (202) 514-1888

JUSTICE DEPARTMENT REACHES FAIR HOUSING ACT SETTLEMENT WITH MEMPHIS DEVELOPERS, ARCHITECTS AND ENGINEERS

WASHINGTON – The Justice Department today reached a Fair Housing Act settlement with a group of developers, builders, architects and engineers related to the design and construction of two Memphis-area apartment complexes. Today’s settlement resolves the government’s claims, as well as those filed by the Memphis Center for Independent Living (MCIL), a disability rights organization. The suits were brought to enforce provisions of the federal Fair Housing Act that require newly or recently constructed dwellings to include features designed to make them more accessible to persons with physical disabilities.

“Those who design and construct housing units may not ignore their obligation to make them accessible to persons with disabilities,” said Wan J. Kim, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. “The Justice Department will continue its vigorous enforcement of all the fair housing laws.”

In 2004, the court ruled that the defendants violated the Fair Housing Act by failing to design and build accessible pedestrian walkways from ground floor apartment units to public street and on-site amenities at the apartment complexes. The court also found a number of other violations, including the defendants’ failures to provide accessible clubhouses; accessible parking at complex amenities; thresholds at breezeways without steps; bathroom, bedroom, and walk-in closet doors wide enough for wheelchair passage; thermostats within the reach of persons in wheelchairs; reinforcements in bathroom walls; adequate clearance space for wheelchair passage into the kitchen and use of counter space; and sufficient clear floor space in front of bathroom sinks. The settlement, which still must be approved by the court, requires the defendants to retrofit apartments; to retrofit public and common use areas; to provide accessible pedestrian routes; to pay damages and civil penalties; and to undergo training on the requirements of the Fair Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

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 all over 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 the Housing Discrimination Tip Line (1-800-896-7743), email the Justice Department at fairhousing@usdoj.gov, or contact the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development at 1-800-669-9777.

The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability and familial status. Since January 1, 2001, the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division has filed 216 cases to enforce the Fair Housing Act, 97 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>.

###

07-078