



Department of Justice

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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT SETTLES DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION CASE WITH CHICAGO AREA MUNICIPALITY

WASHINGTON — The Village of South Elgin, Ill., has agreed to settle allegations that it violated the Fair Housing Act by refusing a permit to allow Unity House Inc. to operate a home for seven residents recovering from addictions to drugs and alcohol, the Justice Department announced today.

Under the settlement, which must still be approved by the United States District Court in Chicago, the village must allow Unity House to operate with up to seven residents recovering from drug or alcohol addiction. The settlement also requires the village to pay a total of \$25,000 in damages to Unity House, \$7,500 each to two residents who were not able to live in the home when the permit was denied, and \$15,000 to the United States as a civil penalty. The settlement also requires relevant village officials and employees to receive training on the Fair Housing Act and requires the village to keep and maintain records for the next three years relating to other zoning and land use requests regarding homes for persons with disabilities.

“We are pleased that an amicable settlement was reached in this case,” said Wan J. Kim, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. “All persons with disabilities deserve the right to be protected by federal civil rights laws.”

“This settlement should send a message to other communities that no municipality, driven by neighborhood opposition, can prohibit persons recovering from addictions from enjoying the benefits of living in the safe and supportive environment of a group home,” said Patrick J. Fitzgerald, U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois.

Unity House is a group home for persons recovering from alcohol or drug dependency. Under the Fair Housing Act, persons recovering from drug or alcohol addiction are protected from discrimination in housing because they are recovering from addiction. Persons who are currently using illegal drugs, however, are not protected by the disability provisions of the Fair Housing Act.

Fighting illegal housing discrimination is a top priority of the Justice Department. In February, 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, however, is not limited to the areas hit by Hurricane Katrina, but targets housing discrimination all over the country.

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

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 215 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 www.usdoj.gov/crt.

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