



# Department of Justice

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## **JUSTICE DEPARTMENT SETTLES ALLEGATIONS OF DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION AGAINST TEXAS DEVELOPERS, ARCHITECTS, ENGINEERS**

The Justice Department today settled a lawsuit against 10 Austin, Texas developers, builders, architects and engineers alleging disability discrimination in the design and construction of two housing developments in Austin. The suit, filed in U.S. District Court for the Western District of Texas, was brought to enforce provisions of the federal Fair Housing Act that require recently constructed dwellings to include features designed to make the dwellings more accessible to persons with physical disabilities.

"People with disabilities, like all Americans, deserve the opportunity to obtain fair housing in their communities," said Wan J. Kim, assistant attorney general for the Civil Rights Division. "This lawsuit under the Fair Housing Act helps to ensure that we remain a welcoming society for all Americans."

Under the consent decree, which must be approved by the court, the following companies have all agreed to make accessibility retrofits at St. John's Village and Hunting Meadows Apartments.

- Legend Communities Inc., which does business as, SDC Austin, Communities
- Randall Jones Engineering, Inc.
- Alexander Consulting Engineers, Inc., which does business as, Professional Design Group
- Trugreen Landcare, L.L.C., which does business as, Land Design Studio
- Hatch Partnership, L.L.P., Architects
- Danze & Davis Architects, Inc.
- St. John's Housing Partnership, L.P.
- SMDC Development, Inc.
- Decker Lane Partners, L.P. and
- SDCW Development Corp.

St. John's Village is a complex of 156 rental apartments, including 52 ground-floor units and Huntington Meadows has 200 rental apartments, including 110 ground-floor units. Under the Fair Housing Act, ground-floor units in non-elevator buildings must contain certain accessible features, such as: usable doors; accessible routes into and through the units; accessible light switches, electrical outlets, thermostats and other environmental controls, reinforced walls in bathrooms for installation of grab bars and usable kitchens and bathrooms.

The defendants will retrofit parking areas, paths and walkways, public and common-use areas, as well as the interiors of ground-floor units, to enhance the accessibility of the complexes to disabled residents and their guests. The decree also requires the defendants to establish a \$50,000 fund which will be used to compensate individuals harmed by the inaccessible housing and to pay \$10,000 in civil penalties to the government. The settlement also mandates the defendants to undergo training on the requirements of the Fair Housing Act and to make periodic reports to the government on the status of their facilities.

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 209 cases to enforce the Fair Housing Act, including 97 based on disability discrimination. For more information about the Civil Rights Division and the laws it enforces, visit <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt>.