



Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc.

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Housing Discrimination Complaint Settles for \$40,000

Meadowbrook Apartments in Chesterfield County changes policy

CHESTERFIELD COUNTY, VA –Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc. (HOME) settled a housing discrimination case with W.S. Carnes, Inc., owner of Meadowbrook Apartments complex in North Chesterfield. The case alleged that Defendants violated the federal Fair Housing Act for failing to accept Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) as income. The complaint contended that refusing to accept disability income for housing discriminates against someone because of their disability, which is a violation of the Fair Housing Act.

In March 2014, a Hopewell woman brought to HOME's attention Meadowbrook's policy against accepting SSDI as a sole source of qualifying income. After an investigation that included fair housing testing, HOME filed a formal complaint with U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in March, 2015. In the complaint, HOME claimed that this policy constituted housing discrimination against people with disabilities because 100% of SSDI recipients are disabled.¹ W.S. Carnes, Inc. responded to the complaint and denied that it discriminates against any tenant or prospective tenant on the basis of disability.

HUD proceeded with the investigation and facilitated the settlement. The settlement resolves all claims in the case. Part of the settlement includes a \$20,000 fund that Meadowbrook Apartments will set aside to make reasonable modifications to the units or complex as requested by people with disabilities or on its own initiative. Another \$20,000 will be used to compensate HOME for the time and resources used in the investigation.

In addition, W.S. Carnes, Inc. will train relevant staff at all of their rental properties on fair housing laws. It will also market Meadowbrook's housing opportunities and its reasonable modification fund to Richmond-area disability advocacy groups. The fund will help make units and common areas at Meadowbrook more accessible to people with disabilities, and could include features such as ramps, grab bars, widening of doorways, and other improvements.

Heather Crislip, president and CEO of HOME stated, "Every time a person is denied access to the housing of their choice because of their membership in a protected class², it limits free choice to housing. We are pleased and grateful that W.S. Carnes, Inc. worked with us to change policies and marketing efforts to be welcoming to people with disabilities."

Paul Carnes, President of W.S. Carnes, Inc., stated that, "for more than 40 years, we have strived to maintain a welcoming and comfortable environment for all of our tenants at Meadowbrook Apartments, including individuals with disabilities. We take our responsibility to be an equal opportunity housing provider seriously and have always done our best to go above and beyond what is legally required. In this case, even before we found out about HOME's complaint, we had already changed our rental policy to allow SSDI as an acceptable sole income source after members of our staff

¹ Social Security Administration, Benefits for People with Disabilities, <http://www.ssa.gov/disability/>

² <http://homeofva.org/get-help/housing-discrimination>

learned during an annual training course that excluding SSDI could be considered discriminatory. We fully support HOME's mission and were glad we could work with them to bring about a prompt and amicable resolution to this case." In 2013, private fair housing agencies like HOME received a total of 9,088 complaints on the basis of disability, comprising 48% of all complaints nationally. Any persons who believe that they were treated differently because of their disability-related needs, or any individuals who believe that they have been victims of any type of housing discrimination anywhere in Virginia should contact HOME at 804-354-0641. The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination based on seven "protected classes": race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, and familial status (families with children under age 18). Fair housing laws in Virginia offer an additional protection for individuals aged 55 years or older.

Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc. (HOME), founded in 1971, is a statewide fair housing non-profit. HOME's mission is to ensure equal access to housing for all people. HOME investigates housing discrimination and provides support for victims of discrimination. You can learn more about HOME and all of its services at www.HOMEofVA.org.

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