



PRESS RELEASE

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www.HOMEofVA.org

HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES MADE EQUAL FILES HOUSING DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT AGAINST RICHMOND RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

RICHMOND – Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc. (HOME) has filed a fair housing complaint with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) against The Towers Retirement Community in Richmond, Va. and its Roanoke-based parent company Retirement Unlimited, Inc. The Virginia nonprofit fair housing organization, represented by Washington D.C. law firm Relman, Dane & Colfax, PLLC, claims The Towers' policies on the use of motorized mobility devices constitute illegal housing discrimination against people with physical disabilities.

The Towers requires residents using motorized mobility devices to pay an additional \$1,500 security deposit and obtain liability insurance. Another instance of illegal housing discrimination is the requirement that such residents obtain additional assessments of their disability from the complex's staff. Finally, Towers residents who use motorized mobility devices are barred from using the property's transportation services, despite the fact that a mandatory monthly transportation fee is factored into each resident's total rent cost. Applicants and residents of The Towers who do not use powered mobility devices are not subject to these additional onerous requirements.

The Fair Housing Act makes it illegal to discriminate based on a person's disability, including creating barriers to access or applying different terms and conditions to persons with disabilities.

According to HUD, disability complaints constituted the highest percentage of all fair housing complaints from 2007 to 2012 (44 percent in 2012). The National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA) reports that 19 percent of the non-institutionalized U.S. population has a disability. Creating equal access to housing without discrimination for persons with disabilities is an important part of preserving independence.

HOME's complaint was filed together with the complaint of a 71-year-old woman* who utilizes a motorized scooter for all aspects of her daily life after losing her ability to walk from a condition known as severe peripheral neuropathy. The complaint alleges that the complainant's use of a power scooter is a necessary factor in her freedom and independence, and the fines and restrictions imposed on her as a result of her limited mobility are illegal.

"HOME receives more fair housing complaints from people with disabilities than any other protected class," HOME's Director of Fair Housing, Helen Hardiman, said. "Our work in this case demonstrates HOME's commitment to educating housing providers and consumers on their rights and responsibilities under fair housing laws."

Any persons who believe that they were treated differently because of their mobility devices or other disability-related needs at The Towers Retirement Community or any other Retirement Unlimited property, or any individuals who believe that they have been victims 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.

HOME was founded in 1971 and investigates housing discrimination and provides support for discrimination victims. HOME also helps first-time homebuyers, assists homeowners to avoid foreclosure, and conducts policy and research initiatives that expand housing opportunity. Additional information is available at www.HOMEofVA.org.

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*We apologize that she is unavailable for media interviews. HOME staff is available for interviews.

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