



For Immediate Release September 25, 2014

Contact:

Mike Burnette, Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc. (HOME)  
(804) 354-0641 x118, [mburnette@HOMEofVA.org](mailto:mburnette@HOMEofVA.org)

Dr. Millard "Pete" Stith, President, St. Paul's College  
(434) 848-6401 [mdstith@saintpauls.edu](mailto:mdstith@saintpauls.edu)

## **Federal Fair Housing Complaint Filed Against The Town of Lawrenceville, Brunswick County, and Sheriff Roberts**

*Every person in the U.S. is protected by the Fair Housing Act  
regardless of their immigration status.*

Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc. (HOME) and St. Paul's College announce the filing of a federal housing discrimination complaint at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) against the Town of Lawrenceville, Brunswick County, and Brunswick County Sheriff Brian Roberts. The complaint alleges that participants of the Unaccompanied Alien Children's (UAC) program were denied an equal housing opportunity and subjected to discriminatory statements based on their national origin, race, and/or color. In addition, a civil rights discrimination complaint has been filed against the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in their Office of Civil Rights for failing to honor its contract with St. Paul's, making housing unavailable to UAC children based on their national origin, race, and/or color.

In June 2014, Saint Paul's College, a private enterprise zoned for such use, negotiated a contract with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to provide shelter for up to 500 immigrant children without parents in the United States. Upon being informed of the impending lease contract and after meaningful consultation with the college, elected and employed officials of the town of Lawrenceville and Brunswick County orchestrated and implemented a plan to block the deal. Purported concerns by these individuals are grounded in false stereotypes about Latinos and reflect discrimination based on race, color, and/or national origin.

Among other actions, Brunswick County Sheriff Brian Roberts also made discriminatory statements to the media about UAC participants. “There is this negative perception of gang violence – these people are coming from Central America,” he said, squarely attributing the discrimination to stereotypes based on the children’s national origin. Once the contract was fully executed by HHS and St. Paul’s, the same group of municipal officials continued their push to rescind it. Their efforts were successful, and HHS pulled out of the contract on June 20, 2014. Dr. Millard (Pete) Stith, President of St. Paul’s College, stated, “Despite the blessing of Lawrenceville officials and Lawrenceville’s assurance that proper zoning requirements were met for the Unaccompanied Alien Children’s (UAC) program, the United States Department of Health and Human Services removed St. Paul’s College as a host location despite a fully executed contract. Because of this decision, St. Paul’s College has been severely injured. The school would have received \$160,000 a month in rent from the federal government. This project would have given St. Paul’s College the much-needed funding to complete necessary improvements to the campus and repay creditors.” Failure to implement the contract has made housing unavailable to UAC participants based on their national origin, race, and/or color.

Heather Mullins Crislip, President & CEO of Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc., added that “The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination by housing providers, including municipalities, whose discriminatory practices make housing unavailable to persons on account of race or color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status, or disability. Every person in the United States is protected by the Fair Housing Act regardless of their immigration status. Our investigation revealed that the federal Fair Housing Act was violated when the St. Paul’s contract was rescinded because of discriminatory push-back from the town.”

HOME encourages officials to reconsider their opposition for this arrangement and propose a solution that does not violate federal fair housing laws. Not only was this action a violation of federal fair housing law, it also denied the community a much needed boost to its economic activity and a path out of the crushing debt facing the College. HOME welcomes further discussion on the matter as it relates to fair housing rights and obligations.

#### **Important Points:**

- Every person in the United States is protected by the Fair Housing Act **regardless of their immigration status.**  
[http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program\\_offices/fair\\_housing\\_equal\\_opp/HousingProviders#C](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/HousingProviders#C)
- The Fair Housing Act (FHA), 42 U.S.C. 3601 *et seq.*, prohibits discrimination by housing providers, including municipalities, whose discriminatory practices make housing unavailable to persons on account of **race or color**, religion, sex, **national origin**, familial status, or disability.

- Precedent has been set: the U.S. Department of Justice has taken enforcement action against local municipalities that have attempted to reduce or limit the number of Hispanic families that live in their communities.  
[http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/hce/housing\\_coverage.php#nat](http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/hce/housing_coverage.php#nat)
- Title VI, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d et seq., was enacted as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance which includes local municipalities.
- St. Paul's College was assured by Lawrenceville's town manager that proper zoning requirements were met for this program because it satisfied allowable uses for its current zoning designation. In addition, the college also reached out to the Lawrenceville police chief and fire chief prior to the execution of the contract. These three individuals gave St. Paul's their blessing to move forward with the plan.

---

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 discrimination victims. You can learn more about HOME and all of its services at [www.HOMEofVA.org](http://www.HOMEofVA.org)

St. Paul's College (SPC) was founded in 1888 as a private historically black college. In 2013, the college closed because it lost its accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. In the years leading up to its closure, SPC accrued approximately \$4 million in debt. SPC pursued several options to try to satisfy its debt, including partnerships with other schools or the commonwealth of Virginia, but those attempts were unsuccessful, and the school closed on June 28, 2013.

---

### **Educational Takeaways:**

The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing, and in other housing-related transactions based on race, color, national origin, religion, gender, disability, familial status, and being at least 55 years old.

National Origin means where you are from or perceived to be from, and includes ancestry, ethnicity, birthplace, culture, and language. Sometimes national origin discrimination is based on perceptions or stereotypes related to the language someone speaks or their citizenship status.

Examples of potential national origin discrimination include:

- Making housing unavailable based on stereotypes of your national origin.

- Refusing to rent to people who don't speak English.
- Charging a higher rent or security deposit based on ethnicity.
- Making offensive statements about where you are from or calling you names because of where you are from.
- Housing advertisements stating that persons are preferred or not wanted because of their ethnicity.
- Steering or restricting persons to one area of a building or complex because of where they are from.
- Requiring only people from different countries show extra forms of identification to apply for housing.
- Refusing to allow you to communicate with an interpreter or refusing to rent to you because you need an interpreter.
- Not allowing you to use amenities within the complex or restricting your use of the amenities because of your ancestry.