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HUD SETTLES CIVIL RIGHTS CLAIMS MADE BY RESIDENTS OF FIRST PUBLIC HOUSING SITE IN VIRGINIA TO BE PRIVITIZED VIA FEDERAL RAD PROGRAM

Hopewell, Va., October 2, 2017— Today, five former public housing residents settled fair housing complaints they filed in Spring of 2017 with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) related to the privatization and redevelopment of their Hopewell, Virginia public housing complex under HUD’s Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program [\[i\]](#). The complaints alleged that the local housing authority and the developer discriminated against families with children and against residents with disabilities; pushed some residents out of their homes in violation of their legal right to return to the redeveloped units; and relocated other residents to severely overcrowded housing in poor condition [\[ii\]](#).

[HUD announced in May](#) that it had launched a formal investigation into the complaints filed by residents of the Langston Park public housing complex, which was redeveloped and privatized under the RAD program, and renamed the Summit apartments. Today the complainants signed a conciliation agreement with HUD, Hopewell Redevelopment and Housing Authority (HRHA), and the developer Community Housing Partners (CHP) that requires CHP and HRHA to make widespread changes to policy and compensate specific individuals harmed in the past. These changes and compensation include:

- Eliminating discriminatory and unwarranted policies at HRHA and CHP;
- Appointing a fair housing coordinator in perpetuity who will provide resources and contact information for how applicants and residents can file fair housing complaints at HUD;
- Monitoring of both CHP and HRHA’s future compliance with fair housing laws, by HUD as well as through fair housing testing conducted by an outside expert;
- Improved procedures by CHP and HRHA for handling requests for reasonable accommodations by people with disabilities;
- Improved relocation procedures for future RAD projects addressing resident needs proactively from beginning to end;
- Installation of an age-appropriate playground for older children at the Summit with resident input;
- Creation of fully funded after-school and summer programs for children at the Summit; and

- Monetary compensation totaling more than \$225,000 for the named complainants and a \$112,300 compensation fund for other residents of the property whose fair housing rights were violated based on family status.

Attorneys with the Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC) and Housing Opportunities Make Equal of Virginia, Inc. (HOME) filed the complaints on behalf of their clients to prevent further civil rights violations against their clients and other residents who were harmed in the RAD redevelopment process and/or continue to be discriminated against. Housing discrimination is a problem that is not exclusive to Hopewell or Virginia, and Helen Hardiman, vice president of law and policy at HOME says victories can be achieved one step at a time. “Since 1988, the federal Fair Housing Act has prohibited housing discrimination against people because they have a disability or kids. It’s frustrating that this discrimination still exists in our communities, but it is satisfying that we could halt these egregious practices and grant some relief for families and people with disabilities who lived or live at housing managed by HRHA or CHP.”

RAD is often touted as the new frontier of public housing, but advocates are concerned that the program lacks adequate accountability to protect residents’ rights. Lack of HUD oversight and broad program discretion under RAD can lead to situations like Hopewell. According to Kim Rolla, attorney with the Civil Rights and Racial Justice Program at Legal Aid Justice Center, “If HUD doesn’t improve oversight of the RAD program, the Summit could be just the tip of a wave of massive problems as HUD and local housing authorities privatize public housing to finance its redevelopment.” There are currently several dozen other public housing communities in Virginia that HUD has approved to convert under the program. ([See here for a list of localities/communities approved for RAD conversion.](#)) These ‘public-private partnerships’ are still publicly funded and their purpose is to serve the lowest income community members, not primarily for developers or investors to make money. “We need HUD to monitor these programs and ensure our tax dollars are being used for their intended purpose,” Rolla states.

[FHEO Summit Conciliation Agreement \(PDF\)](#)

About the Legal Aid Justice Center

The [Legal Aid Justice Center](#) (LAJC) fights injustice in the lives of individual Virginians while rooting out exploitative policies and practices that keep people in poverty. LAJC uses impact litigation, community organizing, and policy advocacy to solve urgent problems in areas such as housing, education, civil rights, immigration, healthcare and consumer finance.

About Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc.

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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