

ACLU, ACLU OF VIRGINIA SUE TO CHALLENGE DISCRIMINATORY HOUSING POLICY AT APARTMENT COMPLEX IN CHESTERFIELD COUNTY, VA

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JUNE 4, 2019

The ACLU and the ACLU of Virginia, along with Relman, Dane & Colfax, PLLC, a Washington, D.C.-based civil rights law firm, filed [a federal lawsuit](#) today against the owner of a Chesterfield County apartment complex for application policies that discriminate against black people.

The lawsuit, entered today in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia on behalf of Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc. (HOME), explains how the blanket criminal record screening policy used at Sterling Glen Apartments is intended to keep African Americans from living there and disproportionately harms people of color.

“Bans like these not only pose a barrier to people reentering the community after release from jail or prison, but also those with records who have been living and working in the community for years or even decades,” said ACLU of Virginia Dunn Legal Fellow Jennifer Safstrom. “Lack of access to permanent housing can also increase rates of recidivism, perpetuating cycles of criminalization and making communities less safe.”

Since at least 2017, Sterling Glen has stated on its application form that no person who has ever been convicted of any felony can live there. It also bars applicants with many less serious misdemeanor offenses, including drug possession charges.

Long-standing obstacles in the criminal justice system have created race-based differences in outcomes even for the same types of crimes. People of color are disproportionately punished for the same crimes as white people and become entrapped in a cycle of incarceration through barriers to re-entry in housing, credit and employment.

Owned by Wisely Properties and operated by Multifamily Management Services, Inc., both located in Staunton, Va., Sterling Glen is located in a predominantly white part of western Chesterfield. Overall in the county, African Americans make up 22% of the population but 46% have felony convictions. Recent research shows that a criminal record has little to no effect on whether a tenant will be successful.

The lawsuit seeks a permanent injunction to force the owners to revise their criminal records policy to conform with anti-discriminatory state and federal housing laws.

“We want landlords to understand that blanket bans are not an effective remedy to ensure the health and safety of your residents,” said C. Alexander Guzmán, director of fair housing for HOME of Virginia, a fair housing organization.

He added, “We hope they view tenants, especially those who have encountered the criminal justice system, as individuals who have aspirations as we all do. They deserve to live in a place where they are safe, where they can raise their families and become successful members of our communities.”

Chesterfield County, Virginia

Sterling Glen’s housing policy discriminates against Black renters in a mostly white area of Chesterfield County

