

NEWS RELEASE



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HOME Settles Race Discrimination Lawsuit Against Sterling Glen Apartments Settlement Includes New Application Policy Regarding Criminal History

RICHMOND, VA – A Chesterfield County, Va., apartment complex and its management have agreed to change their blanket policy on criminal record screening to settle a lawsuit brought by the ACLU, the ACLU of Virginia, and the civil rights law firm Relman, Dane & Colfax, PLLC, on behalf of Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc. (HOME).

The new policy should be an industry model for how landlords can screen applicants fairly and avoid discrimination, according to the attorneys in the case.

The lawsuit, filed June 4 in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, argued that the screening policy used by Sterling Glen Apartments, Wisely Properties, LLC, and Multifamily Management Services, Inc., discriminated against people on the basis of race.

The revised policy only considers felony convictions for specific categories of offenses, excludes misdemeanor convictions, and does not treat people differently based on whether the applicant is on probation or parole.

Most importantly, the policy assures individualized consideration for every applicant, allowing a prospective tenant to share information as part of the application review process, including the facts or circumstances surrounding their criminal conduct, proof of rehabilitation efforts, and evidence of a good tenant or employment history before or after the conviction or conduct.

“By adopting this new policy, Wisely has become a model and example for all housing providers in Virginia who do not conduct an individualized criminal

background screening,” said Heather Mullins Crislip, president and CEO of HOME. “A policy that first screens applicants on their income and credit, then allows for a limited and relevant criminal background screening creates a more diverse community and helps many people who are trying to get their lives back on track be members of their community of choice. We’re grateful that Wisely took our concerns for equity in the process seriously and that we were able to work out an ideal policy.”

This lawsuit was particularly important because it addressed applicant screening processes that had a disproportionate and discriminatory effect on African-American in a predominantly white part of Chesterfield County.

Also, as part of the settlement, the respondents agreed to train their employees in fair housing and make a \$15,000 donation to HOME to continue HOME’s systemic work to uncover and address housing discrimination. They also will pay damages and attorney’s fees related to the matter.

In reaching a settlement, both sides quickly came to the table to change Sterling Glen’s policies to comply with the federal Fair Housing Act and the Virginia Fair Housing law and to, most importantly, benefit applicants.

The original complaint is [here](#).
The settlement is available [here](#).
Sterling Glen’s new model policy is available [here](#).

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About Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc.

HOME Virginia is Virginia’s premier fair housing and housing counseling organization, offering a variety of programs and services designed to ensure equal access to housing for all people. HOME is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation and a HUD-approved housing counseling agency.

About Relman, Dane & Colfax PLLC

Relman, Dane & Colfax is dedicated to protecting rights and enforcing our nation's civil rights laws. Our diverse group of attorneys comes from a broad variety of backgrounds and includes nationally-recognized experts in complex and class action civil rights litigation. Our paralegals and other professional staff provide critical support to the firm’s civil rights mission.

About the ACLU

The American Civil Liberties Union was founded in 1920 and is our nation's guardian of liberty. The ACLU works in the courts, legislatures and communities to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed to all people in

this country by the Constitution and laws of the United States. Read more about the history and mission of the ACLU.

About the ACLU of Virginia

The ACLU of Virginia promotes civil liberties and civil rights for everyone in the Commonwealth through public education, litigation and advocacy with the goal of securing freedom and equality for all.