



## Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc.

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## **Landlord Pays \$70K To Settle Alleged Violations of Fair Housing Protections for Families with Children**

Richmond, VA - Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia (HOME of VA) and Sara [Name changed] settled a federal lawsuit in the Eastern District of Virginia alleging discrimination on the basis of family status in violation of federal fair housing laws, with Defendant Lawrence White Everett. Plaintiffs HOME and Sara received a total settlement of \$70,000, including fees and costs. Additionally, per a prior agreement with the Virginia Attorney General, the defendant stepped away from his role as property manager.

On March 30, 2020, Sara had been desperately searching for a home for herself and her young son. The timing was difficult: a new and dangerous virus was sweeping the world. It was poorly understood and spreading quickly. Sara had been working as a server at a restaurant, and her wages were declining due to business closures across the state as people isolated in their homes. Seeking housing near her job, she was relieved when she saw the “for rent” sign in front of an apartment complex, only one mile from her place of work. She contacted the owner, Lawrence Everett, and was thrilled to learn that there was an apartment available at the complex at a rate she knew she could afford even with her declining wages. She set up a time to view the apartment and met with Mr. Everett at the building. Once she mentioned that her toddler son would be residing with her, however, Mr. Everett stated that he did not rent apartments to families with children.

After being denied the apartment, Sara struggled to find other suitable housing for herself and her son. She stayed in her car when her son was not with her and used her meager earnings to pay for hotel rooms when he was present. Sara stated, “To this day, this time was one of the hardest I have ever endured. I began maxing out my credit cards in order to pay for shelter and food for my son.”

HOME conducted a fair housing investigation, during which Mr. Everett confirmed to a HOME rental tester that he did not rent units to families with children in the building he showed to Sara. HOME then helped Sara file a complaint with the Virginia Fair Housing Office, and that office found her complaint of discrimination on the basis of family status to be justified. Brenda Castañeda, now HOME’s legal director, and Ge’Andra Johnson of Johnson Legal PLLC in Oklahoma, subsequently filed a federal lawsuit in the Richmond federal court on behalf of Sara and HOME against Mr. Everett.

Sara stated of the settlement in that lawsuit, “I wanted to make sure my son and I, and other parents that may find themselves in a similar predicament, never endure the same struggles. Landlords like Mr. Everett should educate themselves about fair housing discrimination and the struggles of being a single parent finding stable housing, especially in this pandemic we have endured.” Ms. Castañeda commented, “We are

glad that Sara was able to receive remuneration for the injury she experienced because of this landlord's unlawful discriminatory practices. HOME hopes that this settlement highlights the real damage that housing discrimination based on family status can cause to families around Virginia.”

**About HOME:** Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia (HOME) is a civil rights fair housing organization with a mission to ensure equal access to housing for all people. Founded in 1971, we exist to address housing-related systemic inequities that perpetuate segregation, concentrations of poverty, and wealth inequality. HOME enacts its mission through fair housing enforcement and advocacy, housing research and policy, and HUD-approved housing counseling and education direct services. At a time when unequal access to housing and credit contributes most to the United States' growing wealth gap, HOME's multifaceted approach is a powerful catalyst toward furthering fair housing. You can learn more about HOME and all its services at [www.HOMEofVA.org](http://www.HOMEofVA.org).

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