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News Release

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Detroit Lakes landlords charged with violating the Fair Housing Act

The United States has commenced suit against two Detroit Lakes landlords who own and rent out several properties in the Detroit Lakes area for violations of the Fair Housing Act. The civil lawsuit, filed on May 15, alleges that Pearl and Gregory Beck violated the Act when they refused to rent a dwelling to a person because of her race.

The U.S. alleges that in July 2007 the prospective tenant responded to an advertisement for the dwelling and was rejected because she was an African-American. During an initial telephone conversation, Pearl Beck said the dwelling, located at 710-712 West Lake Drive, was available to rent. Gregory Beck is listed as a defendant because he is a co-owner of the property.

When the tenant arrived to view the rental unit, Pearl Beck said the unit was not for rent, adding "No way. No way. It's not for rent. I can't do this. I'm not renting to these kinds of people." Beck did not show the prospective tenant the unit.

The prospective tenant contacted Legal Services of Northwest Minnesota, and one of its attorneys contacted Pearl Beck about the unit. Beck allegedly said that the next door neighbors told her that if she rented to "black people" they would move out and she did not want to lose them as tenants. The attorney informed Beck that it is illegal to refuse to rent to someone because of their race.

Then, Beck said the tenant had dogs and that is why she refused to rent the unit. Beck added that she would move into the dwelling herself, and that the dwelling was too small for the prospective tenant. In August 2007, the Becks rented the property to a white male, and the African-American tenant was forced to find other housing in the area.

On July 27, 2007, the prospective tenant filed a complaint of discrimination with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), alleging housing discrimination on the basis of race. HUD investigated the complaint, and on April 6, 2009, issued a charge of discrimination against the defendants, alleging they engaged in discriminatory housing practices,

based on race, in violation of the Fair Housing Act.

The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, familial status, national origin and disability. Civil Rights enforcement is a priority of the U.S. Justice Department (DOJ). Individuals who believe that they may have been victims of housing discrimination can call the Housing Discrimination Tip Line (1-800-896-7743), e-mail DOJ at fairhousing@usdoj.gov, or contact HUD at 1-800-669-9777.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Ana Voss represents the U.S. in this lawsuit.