

NEWS RELEASE



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Justice Department Announces Settlement of Three Landlord-Tenant Matters Under the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act

NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY - January 13, 2012

The United States Attorney's Office and the Camp Pendleton Joint Legal Assistance Office announced today that settlements have been reached with three Southern California apartment complex businesses to resolve allegations that they violated the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA). In all three matters, the apartment complex staff charged Marine and Navy families excess rent after their leases were lawfully terminated pursuant to the SCRA.

The SCRA was enacted to provide certain protections to active and reserve servicemembers who protect the Nation's interests. In the course of their service, both officers and enlistees endure strains on family and finances associated with frequent moves and multiple deployments. The SCRA provides partial relief in the form of a six percent cap on certain interest rates, allowing servicemembers to terminate residential leases before a deployment or duty station move, suspending a judicial proceeding in their absence, and other protective provisions.

A common need among servicemembers in Southern California is the right to terminate a residential lease to comply with military orders for a permanent change of station or for deployment. Under the terms of the settlements, Waterleaf Apartment Homes, Villa Del Mar Apartments, and Prominence Apartments have revised their final account statements to reflect the lawful lease termination date pursuant to the SCRA. Each settlement provided a financial benefit to a Marine or Navy family. In one matter, a young Marine and his family were excused from paying over \$10,000 in improperly-imposed fees.

The U.S. Attorney's Office investigation of these matters began with a referral to its Civil Division from Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Captain Michael McCarthy, of Camp Pendleton's Joint Legal Assistance Office. Early efforts by the Marine Corps to obtain compliance had been rebuffed. Compliance was soon achieved when the U.S. Attorney's Office became involved.

"This Office is committed to vigorous enforcement of the SCRA to ensure that servicemembers receive the full benefits and protections of the law," stated United States Attorney Laura E. Duffy.

Servicemembers and their dependents who believe that their SCRA rights have been violated should contact the nearest Armed Forces Legal Assistance Program office. Office locations may be found at <http://legalassistance.law.af.mil/content/locator.php>. Additional information on the Justice Department's enforcement of the SCRA and other laws protecting servicemembers is available at www.servicemembers.gov.