



**United States Department of Justice
United States Attorney's Office
District of Minnesota**

**B. Todd Jones,
United States Attorney**

**Jeanne F. Cooney
Director of Community Relations
(612) 664-5611
email: jeanne.cooney@usdoj.gov**

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, April 28, 2011
WWW.JUSTICE.GOV/USAO/MN

U. S. Attorney Announces Formation of Civil Rights Unit *While Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Freedom Riders*

Earlier today, B. Todd Jones, the U.S. Attorney for the District of Minnesota, announced the formation of a Civil Rights Unit in the U.S. Attorney's Office. The work of this unit will focus on enforcing federal civil rights laws by initiating investigations and commencing civil actions against individuals and corporations found to be violating the federal civil rights of Minnesotans.

In making today's announcement, Jones said, "The month of May will mark the 50th anniversary of the 'freedom riders,' those brave, young Americans, both black and white, who, in the spring of 1961, called for an end to segregation in the American transit system by taking bus trips throughout the south. Despite the backing of several recent federal rulings that made it unconstitutional to segregate bus riders, freedom riders were repeatedly met with opposition, hatred, and violence. Yet, they persevered, determined to transform civil rights in this country."

The new unit will work to combat discrimination in many areas, including unfair lending practices and discrimination against people with disabilities or members of the Armed Forces. It will focus on enforcing the Fair Housing Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-employment Rights Act, and the Service Members Civil Relief Act, among many other federal civil rights laws. Enforcement tools will include investigations and civil enforcement actions commenced in federal court and enhanced collaboration with the Civil Rights Division in Washington D.C.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in the District of Minnesota has a long history of bringing actions enforcing federal civil rights laws. Past suits have been filed against hospitals for failing to provide adequate and effective communication for deaf patients and state and local governments for failing to make reasonable accommodations to persons with disabilities in regard to police services and park and recreation programs. Other cases have involved claims against private sector entities for failing to remove physical barriers to facilities and landlords for

denying rental housing to people of color and tenants with service animals. The U.S. Attorney's Office also has brought actions against developers who illegally prevented group homes from being established in residential neighborhoods and school districts that systematically failed to prevent bullying of students based on race, sex, and sex stereotypes. In addition to investigating complaints and commencing federal lawsuits in these instances, the U.S. Attorney's Office has initiated compliance reviews under the Americans with Disabilities Act that have resulted in consent decrees and settlement agreements governing emergency 911 systems, jails, hospitals, hotels, and public arenas and stadiums.

Most recently, the U.S. Attorney's Office filed suit against Loki Properties, of Red Wing, alleging it violated the Fair Housing Act when it refused to rent a dwelling to someone based on race. That action is pending in federal district court. In addition, the U.S. Attorney's Office recently settled a lawsuit in which it sued landlords in Detroit Lakes for refusing to show a duplex to an African American women. The landlords agreed to change their policies and procedures, undergo Fair Housing Act training, and advertise rentals as an equal housing opportunity landlord. The landlords also paid monetary damages to the aggrieved party.

While the U.S. Attorney's Office in Minnesota has received national recognition for its civil rights enforcement work in the past, it anticipates that the formation of the Civil Rights Unit will nonetheless improve its efforts in the enforcement of civil rights by concentrating and coordinating the approximately 50 civil rights cases it is investigating and litigating at any one time. Ten Civil Division Assistant U.S. Attorneys will be involved in the work in the Civil Rights Unit, in addition to an investigator and paralegal. Moreover, the unit will work closely with Criminal Division prosecutors whenever appropriate.

The U.S. Attorney's Office, in partnership with the University of Minnesota Law School, also has established a Civil Rights Enforcement Clinic. Beginning in the fall of 2011, several University of Minnesota law students will receive academic credit for working on civil rights enforcement cases at the U.S. Attorney's Office. They will work with members of the new Civil Rights Unit to perform investigative work and legal research and writing as well as participate in settlement conferences, depositions, and hearings. The U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Minnesota is the first U.S. Attorney Office in the country to establish a law school clinic that focuses exclusively on civil rights enforcement.

For more information about the efforts of the U.S. Attorney's Office in the area of civil rights, please see the civil rights brochure in the resource section of the office website, at the web address noted at the top of this release.

###