



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, MARCH 1, 2007
WWW.USDOJ.GOV

CRT
(202) 514-2007
TDD (202) 514-1888

Justice Department Reaches Fair Housing Act Settlement With Owners of Arlington Park Racecourse

WASHINGTON, The Justice Department today reached a settlement with the owners of the Arlington Park Racecourse in Arlington Heights, Ill., resolving claims that the owners violated the provisions of the federal Fair Housing Act that prohibit discrimination on the basis of familial status. The racecourse owners, Arlington Park LLC and Churchill Downs Inc., were sued by the Justice Department in September 2005.

"The Fair Housing Act ensures that families are protected from discrimination when looking for a place to live," said Wan J. Kim, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "The Justice Department's efforts to vigorously enforce the federal fair housing laws will continue to provide fairness in housing markets, so parents, unfettered by unlawful discrimination, can fairly search for homes in which to shelter their families."

"The Fair Housing Act promises equal treatment for families with children," said Gary Shapiro, First Assistant United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois. "And we are committed to the vigorous enforcement of this important law."

The racecourse owners operate a thoroughbred horse racing facility with on-site housing for individuals who work with the racehorses. In 2004, HOPE Fair Housing Center, a fair housing advocacy organization based in Wheaton, Ill., filed a complaint with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) alleging that the owners had a policy in place which restricted families from living in six residential buildings on the track's "Backstretch," in violation of the Fair Housing Act. At the time HOPE filed its complaint, five of the six buildings had private bathrooms and air conditioning, and these five buildings were the only residential buildings on the Backstretch that had these amenities. Upon receiving HOPE's complaint, HUD conducted an investigation which found that the owners were discriminating on the basis of familial status. The case was referred to the Justice Department for action, and the lawsuit was subsequently filed against the owners.

Under the terms of the settlement, which was approved today by the federal court, Arlington Park and Churchill Downs will construct new housing units that will be available to Backstretch workers with families; adopt a non-discriminatory policy for the buildings where families with children had previously been excluded from dwelling; pay \$10,000 in a civil penalty, and pay \$160,000 in damages and other relief to resolve HOPE's claims. Under the new policy, the owners will be able to restrict the dwellings in the six buildings to licensed workers only, but may not exclude residents merely because they have children.

Since HOPE filed its complaint with HUD in 2004, the owners have constructed 96 new units of housing with air conditioning and private bathrooms and made these units available to Backstretch workers with families.

Fighting illegal housing discrimination is a top priority of the Justice Department. In February 2006, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales announced Operation Home Sweet Home, a concentrated initiative to expose and eliminate housing discrimination in America. This initiative was inspired by the plight of displaced victims of Hurricane Katrina who were suddenly forced to find new places to live. Operation Home Sweet Home is not limited to the areas hit by Hurricane Katrina and targets housing discrimination all over the country.

More information about Operation Home Sweet Home is available at the Justice Department Web site at <http://www.usdoj.gov/fairhousing>. Individuals who believe that they may have been victims of housing discrimination can call the Housing Discrimination Tip Line (1-800-896-7743), email the Justice Department at fairhousing@usdoj.gov, or contact the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development at 1-800-669-9777.

The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability and familial status. Since January 1, 2001, the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division has filed 218 cases to enforce the Fair Housing Act, 42 of which have alleged discrimination based on familial status. More information about the Civil Rights Division and the laws it enforces is available at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt>.