



Department of Justice

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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT SETTLES DISCRIMINATION LAWSUIT AGAINST ALABAMA LANDLORD

WASHINGTON – The Department of Justice today reached a settlement in a case against Beulah Stevens alleging housing discrimination on the basis of race or color in renting properties owned and managed by the defendant in Saraland, Ala.

The government’s complaint alleged that the defendant violated the federal Fair Housing Act when she discriminated against the victim, Michele Jones, upon learning that her child is biracial and that she associated with African Americans. The complaint also alleged that two fair housing tests conducted by the Mobile Fair Housing Center (now known as the Center for Fair Housing, Inc. of Mobile, Ala.) showed that the defendant treated white testers who inquired about the availability of units for rent more favorably than African American testers.

“The intent of the Fair Housing Act is to provide all Americans equal access to housing unencumbered by the pernicious obstacle of racial discrimination,” said Wan J. Kim, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. “This type of racial discrimination is against the law and will not be tolerated.”

“This case shows that the Department of Justice and this office believe that housing discrimination is a serious violation of the law,” said Deborah J. Rhodes, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Alabama. “We will enforce federal laws against racial discrimination.”

The case was initiated when Ms. Jones filed a fair housing complaint on behalf of herself and her daughter with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). After investigating the matter, HUD issued a charge of discrimination, and the matter was referred to the Justice Department, which filed the lawsuit in May 2005.

“HUD commends the Department of Justice's ongoing commitment to enforcing this nation's fair housing laws,” said Kim Kendrick, HUD's Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and

Equal Opportunity. “No one should be denied housing because of his or her race or because of the race of any member of that household. This settlement was not just a victory for this mother and daughter, but it was a greater victory for the principles of justice and equality.”

The settlement, which must be approved by the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Alabama, resolves the government’s case as well as the related claims of Ms. Jones and Angela Macon, a neighbor of Ms. Jones, both of whom intervened in the government’s lawsuit. Under the settlement, the defendant has agreed to pay more than \$40,000 in damages and penalties; to post a nondiscriminatory rental policy; to undergo training on the requirements of the Fair Housing Act; and to submit periodic reports to the Justice Department.

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 actively targets housing discrimination all over the country.

More information about Operation Home Sweet Home can be found at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/housing/fairhousing/index.html>. Individuals who believe that they may have been victims of housing discrimination can call the Housing Discrimination Tip Line at 1-800-896-7743, e-mail fairhousing@usdoj.gov, or contact the Department of Housing and Urban Development at 1-800-669-9777.

The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, familial status, national origin and disability. Since Jan. 1, 2001, the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division has filed 215 cases to enforce the Fair Housing Act, including 65 based on race discrimination. More information about the Civil Rights Division and the laws it enforces can be found at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt>.

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