Department of Justice

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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT REACHES SETTLEMENT WITH HONOLULU APARTMENT COMPLEX TO RESOLVE FAIR HOUSING ACT CLAIMS

WASHINGTON - The Justice Department today reached a partial settlement with the owner, builder, architect and civil engineer of the West Loch Village, a 150-unit apartment complex in Ewa Beach, Hawaii. Today's agreement, filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Hawaii, partially resolves allegations of disability discrimination in the design and construction of the complex.

The original complaint was filed to enforce provisions of the federal Fair Housing Act that require recently constructed dwellings to include features designed to make the dwellings more accessible to persons with physical disabilities. The Department's suit was brought as a result of a referral to the Justice Department by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Under the partial settlement, which must be approved by the court, the defendants, (the City and County of Honolulu; Mecon Hawaii Limited; Yamasato, Fujiwara, Higa & Associates Inc.; Hawaii Affordable Properties Inc.; and R.M. Towill Corp.) will pay all costs related to making the apartment complex accessible to persons with disabilities. The defendants must also establish a $75,000 fund which will be used to compensate individuals harmed by the inaccessible housing. The settlement also requires the defendants to undergo training on the requirements of the Fair Housing Act.

"Accessible housing is a necessity for people with disabilities," said Wan J. Kim, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "These types of design and construction cases reflect the Justice Department's commitment to enforcing this nation's fair housing laws."

The United States' claim against the City and County of Honolulu, alleging that one resident of the complex was hurt when he fell due to the design and construction defects, is

not settled by this partial settlement agreement.

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 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 Jan. 1, 2001, the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division has filed 216 cases to enforce the Fair Housing Act, 96 of which have alleged discrimination based on disability. More information about the Civil Rights Division and the laws it enforces is available at www.usdoj.gov/crt.

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