



WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE
FOR CIVIL RIGHTS & URBAN AFFAIRS

For Immediate Release

**THIRD NATIONWIDE LAWSUIT FILED
IN INITIATIVE TO STOP DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

WASHINGTON, D.C., September 22, 2005--The Equal Rights Center represented by the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs announced today the filing of the third in a series of lawsuits against nationally known residential apartment developers. This most recent lawsuit, filed in federal district court in Greenbelt Maryland, against developer AvalonBay Communities, alleges continuous and systematic civil rights violations of persons with disabilities in the design and construction of more than 85 apartment complexes in Maryland, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Virginia, Washington, and the District of Columbia. These complexes include more than 24,000 individual apartment units.

AvalonBay, a real estate investment trust, headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, has been identified as one of the 25 largest developers of multifamily housing units in the United States.

"We are determined to do everything we can to change behavior so that the rights of people with disabilities are not violated. Our message is clear and simple. Physically barring people from obtaining a home is wrong," said Rabbi Bruce E. Kahn, the Executive Director of the Equal Rights Center. "It is unjustifiable, offensive and it must be stopped. A person with disabilities deserves to have a place to live just as much as anyone else deserves to. Housing providers should not only comply with the law but they should embrace the spirit of it."

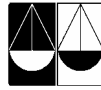
This new action is one of three lawsuits brought against major developers in recent months as part of the Equal Rights Center's efforts to eliminate disability-based discrimination in the housing industry. "At the Equal Rights Center we are committed to doing everything we can to convince every company that stands in need of such convincing that they should and must treat all people fairly, under the law," concluded Rabbi Kahn.

The Equal Rights Center began this initiative with the filing of a lawsuit against Archstone-Smith Trust, one of the nation's largest apartment developers, in December 2004, and continued last week, with the filing of an action against Bozzuto and Associates, Inc., a well-known east coast developer.

"Since 1991 the law has required developers to include basic features of accessibility in multi-family housing," said Isabelle M. Thabault, Director of the Fair Housing Project at the Washington Lawyers' Committee. "Years later, developers like AvalonBay still build apartment complexes that are difficult or impossible for persons who use wheel chairs to access. AvalonBay is a major provider of rental housing in this area and nationally, and they should be leaders in stopping this type of discrimination. "

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The federal Fair Housing Act requires all covered multi-family dwellings, built for first occupancy after March 13, 1991, to be designed and constructed in a manner that incorporates certain features of both accessibility and adaptable design including usable doors, kitchens and bathrooms, reinforced walls for grab bars and accessible and usable public and common use areas.

The Equal Rights Center is represented against AvalonBay by the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs and the Washington law firm of Gilbert Heintz & Randolph, LLP.

"The allegations stated in the complaint are readily verifiable and beyond dispute, said Gary Thompson of Gilbert Heintz & Randolph LLP. "These fair housing violations should not come as a surprise to a large company like AvalonBay, since the requirements have been in place for over a decade. What is surprising is that AvalonBay appears simply to have ignored the requirements, as is evidenced by the pattern and practice of violations at multiple properties. We are committed to ensuring that the law is followed, either through litigation or agreement."

Originally established in 1983 as the Fair Housing Council of Greater Washington, the Equal Rights Center is a private, not-for-profit, civil rights agency that is now a product of mergers with both the Fair Employment Council in 1999 and the Disability Rights Council of Greater Washington on June 30, 2005. It is dedicated to identifying, challenging, and eliminating discrimination in housing, employment, public accommodations, and government services through education, research, testing, counseling, enforcement, and advocacy. To obtain more information about the Equal Rights Center, please go to www.equalrightscenter.org or call the Equal Rights Center at 202.234.3062.

The Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs was established in 1968 to provide pro bono legal services to address issues of discrimination and entrenched poverty. Since its founding, the Committee has handled more than 5,000 cases on behalf of individuals and advocacy organizations in the areas of equal employment, fair housing, public accommodations, public education, asylum and refugee rights, and disability rights. For more information about the Committee, see www.washlaw.org. The Committee can be reached at 202.319.1000.

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