



**WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE  
FOR CIVIL RIGHTS & URBAN AFFAIRS**

**For Immediate Release**

**MORE AREA LANDLORDS CHARGED WITH HOUSING DISCRIMINATION WHILE  
OTHERS PLEDGE TO STOP DISCRIMINATION AS PART OF  
CRITICAL SETTLEMENTS**

WASHINGTON, D.C., September 8, 2005—Today, the Equal Rights Center (ERC) and the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs (WLC) announced the filing of lawsuits against two area landlords, and the favorable settlement of a similar lawsuit and other administrative complaints against landlords charged with denying housing to people using Housing Choice Vouchers.

The combined settlements include one with Sawyer Realty Holdings LLC, among the District's largest apartment management companies, that was filed with the D.C. Superior Court earlier today. This agreement resolves a complaint filed in April, and includes numerous commitments from Sawyer that will help ensure that individuals with federal rental assistance in the form of Housing Choice Vouchers (formally known as Section 8 vouchers) are given fair and equal access to Sawyer-managed apartments in the District. As part of the settlement Sawyer will also pay \$130,000 to the ERC to continue its ongoing efforts to fight discrimination as well as for attorneys' fees and costs associated with litigating the case.

In the past few months, the ERC has obtained settlements with several other landlords, resulting in comparable commitments to treat individuals with rental vouchers fairly and to not discriminate based on source of income. These settlements, taken together, open more than 500 apartment units in the District of Columbia to persons who use Housing Choice Vouchers to cover a portion of their monthly rent.

"It is just flat out wrong to deny an individual or a family a proper home only because the prospective tenant is assisted by a government voucher to pay the rent," said the ERC Executive Director, Rabbi Bruce E. Kahn. "The settlements we have reached represent significant victories for civil rights compliance and we are pleased to be receiving Sawyer Realty's cooperation in this effort. Too many residents of metropolitan Washington believe that the battle for basic civil rights ended years ago. I want everyone to know that, sadly, the fight is still being fought on many fronts and it is a long way from being over."

Continuing its fight against this type of discrimination, the ERC filed additional lawsuits today in D.C. Superior Court against Horning Brothers and Phifer Realty, Inc., alleging discrimination against prospective tenants who use Housing Choice Vouchers. "Housing Choice Voucher discrimination must end," stated Rabbi Kahn. "The suits announced today represent the Equal Rights Center's ongoing commitment to combating discrimination against Voucher holders."

The new lawsuits, based on evidence uncovered by the ERC, allege that Horning Brothers and Phifer Realty refused to accept Housing Choice Vouchers, in violation of the D.C. Human Rights Act. The ERC alleges that on multiple occasions, landlords and agents stated that the Housing Choice Vouchers would not be accepted, despite the availability of eligible apartment units. In April of this year the ERC also sued area landlords Gelman Management Company and E & G Group, making similar allegations. Those cases are currently pending.

"Low-income families in the D.C. area are facing a housing crisis. It is simply unacceptable for landlords and property managers in this city to refuse to accept families because of their desire to pay a part of their rent using federally funded vouchers. It is illegal to refuse to accept vouchers, or to have quotas limiting the number of Voucher holders. We are pleased that Sawyer has



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agreed to open its apartment buildings to persons who use Vouchers. We hope these lawsuits and settlements send a clear message to area landlords that stereotypes of low-income persons cannot be used to justify illegal discrimination," said Isabelle Thabault, of the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs.

Today's suits against Horning Brothers and Phifer, as well as the earlier actions brought against Gelman Management Corporation, E & G Group and others, are part of a broad effort by the Equal Rights Center to stop discrimination against low-income tenants who use Housing Choice Vouchers. In 2001, in response to complaints that area companies were refusing to rent to persons with Housing Choice Vouchers, the Equal Rights Center initiated an investigation of area apartment owners and management companies, including the companies named in today's lawsuits.

Refusal to accept federal housing subsidies violates the D.C. Human Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of source of income. In the District, a party found to have violated the D.C. Human Rights Act may be liable for compensatory and punitive damages, as well as the subject of an injunction. In addition to the District of Columbia, eleven states and numerous local governments, including Montgomery and Howard Counties in Maryland, have enacted local fair housing laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of source of income.

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](http://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](http://www.washlaw.org). The Committee can be reached at (202) 319-1000.

The ERC was represented in the Sawyer litigation by the Washington Lawyers' Committee and Melvin White and William Hagedorn of the law firm of McDermott, Will and Emory, and is represented in the two new lawsuits by the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs, John P. Relman and Reed Colfax of the law firm of Relman & Associates and Gail L. Westover, Carter L. Williams, and Brendan Wilson of the law firm of Sutherland Asbill & Brennan LLP.

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