



WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE
FOR CIVIL RIGHTS & URBAN AFFAIRS

Manassas City Council Approves Settlement of Civil Rights Lawsuit

For Immediate Release

WASHINGTON, D.C., September 23, 2008 – Today, the Equal Rights Center (ERC), a Washington, D.C. based civil rights organization, and 11 residents of Manassas, VA, announced that the City Council for the City of Manassas, Virginia has voted to approve a settlement to resolve a federal civil rights lawsuit alleging discrimination against the City's Latino residents.

The settlement was approved by the Manassas City Council at its meeting on Monday, September 22, 2008. The lawsuit also named as a defendant the Manassas school system and the settlement will be voted on by the Manassas School Board tonight.

“If the School Board approves the settlement, the parties will then present it to the federal district court and will seek the court's approval and dismissal of the case,” said Isabelle Thabault, an attorney with the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs (WLC), who represented the plaintiffs.

The ERC and the individual residents were represented in the lawsuit by the WLC and by the law firm of Beveridge & Diamond, PC.

“We are encouraged by the City's approval of this settlement and are optimistic that the School Board will also approve the settlement at its Board meeting tomorrow evening. Once finally approved, this settlement will go far to make Manassas a more fair and open community for all its residents,” said Donald L. Kahl, the Executive Director of the Equal Rights Center.

The settlement agreement includes expansive new protections for residents related to the City's residential inspections. The agreement also calls for Manassas to hire a City Housing Manager and Advocate who will implement and oversee many of the safeguards in the new procedures, provide an avenue of redress for residents who believe they have been treated unfairly by the city, and serve as a resource for housing-related information for all city residents. Also as part of the settlement, certain City employees will be required to attend fair housing training, and the City will conduct outreach to the Latino community.

The settlement, if approved by the School Board, would also resolve allegations that the Manassas school system improperly released student information to aid the City in its housing inspection efforts.

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As part of the settlement, the City and the School Board agreed to make a payment of \$775,000 to resolve all the plaintiffs' claims of damages, attorneys' fees and administrative costs relating to the lawsuit. If the School Board approves the settlement, the parties will submit the proposed settlement to the U.S. District Court in Alexandria, Va., and request that the Court approve the settlement.

Originally established in 1983, the ERC is celebrating 25 years of protecting civil rights. The ERC is dedicated to identifying, challenging, and eliminating discrimination in housing, employment, public accommodations, and access to government services through education, research, testing, counseling, enforcement and advocacy.

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 fair housing, equal employment, public accommodations, public education, asylum and refugee rights, and disability rights.

Beveridge & Diamond, P.C. is a national law firm founded in 1974. The firm has a deep commitment to pro bono efforts and community affairs. For more information about Beveridge & Diamond, please see www.bdlaw.com.

For more information contact:

Natalie Laber, (202) 234-3062
Communications and Outreach Manager,
Equal Rights Center
nlaber@equalrightscenter.org

Isabelle M. Thabault, Esq., (202) 319-1000, ext 106
Washington Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs
Isabelle_Thabault@washlaw.org

David ("Max") Williamson, Esq., (202) 789-6084
Beveridge & Diamond, P.C.
dwilliamson@bdlaw.com

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