



WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE
FOR CIVIL RIGHTS AND URBAN AFFAIRS

For Immediate Release

Contact: Natalie Laber (202) 370-3204
nlaber@equalrightscenter.org

Equal Rights Center Files Administrative Complaints Against 6 Montgomery County Properties for Source of Income Discrimination

WASHINGTON, D.C., February 24, 2009 – The Equal Rights Center (ERC) – a non-profit, civil rights organization – and the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs, today filed administrative complaints against landlords and property managers of six properties in Montgomery County, Maryland for source of income discrimination.

The six properties are:

- Arbor Crest of Silver Spring, 12801 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904
- Avalon at Traville, 14240 Alta Oaks Drive, Rockville, MD 20850
- Fireside Park, 735 Monroe Street, Rockville, MD 20850
- Park Bethesda, 5325 Westbard Avenue, Bethesda, MD 20816
- Rock Creek Springs, 8000 Eastern Drive, Silver Spring, MD 20910
- Topaz House, 400 East-West Highway, Bethesda, MD 20814

“The ERC has long recognized that voucher holders are an extremely vulnerable population,” said Don Kahl, Executive Director of the ERC. “In Montgomery County, where housing costs virtually insure that many families would be on the streets without their vouchers, discrimination that acts as a barrier to voucher use cannot be tolerated. Today’s administrative complaints convey that message clearly.”

In 1991, Montgomery County added “source of income” as a protected class against housing discrimination. Source of income includes any governmental or private assistance, grant or loan program.

To investigate this problem, the ERC conducted both phone and in person tests where a “tester” would attempt to apply for a rental property as if he had the income and typical household size of

--more--

the average voucher holder in Montgomery County. In the six properties that are the subject of the ERC's complaints, the tester discrimination ranged from out right refusals to rent to housing choice voucher holders to limiting the use of the vouchers and imposing different terms and conditions on the voucher holder.

In October 2008, the ERC released a report, *A Step Away From Homelessness*, which highlighted a **15 percent discrimination rate against Housing Choice Voucher Holders in Montgomery County, Maryland**, more than 17 years after the law first went into effect.

“By allowing voucher holders to seek market rate housing, the voucher program substantially increases access to quality schools, jobs, social services, and safe neighborhoods, and helps to move families out of neighborhoods marked by concentrated poverty and, often, racial segregation,” said Mary Hahn, Fair Housing Project Director at the Washington Lawyers’ Committee.

“Discrimination against voucher holders undermines these important program goals, and today’s administrative filings seek to enforce Montgomery County’s clear repudiation of discrimination against voucher holders,” Hahn said.

The administrative complaints will be investigated by the Montgomery County Office of Human Rights.

###