



For Immediate Release

Ashley White, Equal Rights Center, 202.370.3204
awhite@equalrightscenter.org

Equal Rights Center Files Suit Against Management Firm and Apartment Owner that Discriminate Against Voucher Holders

Legal action taken after request for cooperation ignored

WASHINGTON, D.C., August 24, 2011— Today the Equal Rights Center (ERC)—a national non-profit civil rights organization—filed a lawsuit in the D.C. Superior Court against Alvin L. Aubinoe, Inc. (Aubinoe), a property management firm serving the District, Maryland and Virginia, and the owner of an apartment building, MAC Associates. The complaint alleges that both companies violated the D.C. Human Rights Act by engaging in discrimination on the basis of source of income and, because of a disparate impact on African Americans, race, at the MacArthur Boulevard Apartments, located at 4850 MacArthur Boulevard, N.W., in Washington, D.C.

“Despite the fact that voucher holders are explicitly protected from discrimination under the D.C. Human Rights Act, we continue to see voucher holders being denied housing based solely on their use of a voucher,” said Don Kahl, Executive Director of the ERC. “The Equal Rights Center has been addressing this type of discrimination since 2005, and we have worked with owners and managers of other properties that recognized the importance of complying with the law. We hope that Aubinoe and MAC will now immediately change their practices, and provide equal access to all their housing.”

Prior to filing suit, the ERC conducted a testing investigation, finding Aubinoe representatives were informing testers claiming to be voucher holders that they would not be able to rent an available apartment because Aubinoe would not comply with the requirements of the voucher program. The ERC then reached out to Aubinoe in an effort to collaboratively ensure compliance with the law, but received no response.

Vouchers provide vital support to needy District families by allowing them to move to safe and affordable housing anywhere in the District, so long as the rent is within an approved range. In 2011, the D.C. Housing Authority reported that 10,596 families were being served by the Housing Choice Voucher Program in the District, with nearly 35,000 more on a waitlist. Voucher holders unable to rent because of discrimination lose their vouchers and must go to the end of the waitlist—relegating them to unsafe or over-crowded housing, a shelter, or the streets.

“Companies cannot avoid their obligations under the law by adopting a policy that operates as a blanket rejection of all prospective tenants who use vouchers,” said Megan K. Whyte, Director of the Fair Housing Project for the Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs.

For more than eight years, the ERC has investigated housing providers in the metro area to determine compliance with source of income protections. In 2005, the ERC published its first report documenting a 61% rate of discrimination against voucher holders in the District. As a result of a combination of education and outreach and enforcement, the ERC has reached more than 20 agreements with landlords

and property managers, ultimately opening more than 15,000 apartment units to voucher holders. In 2010, the ERC undertook a second study to determine if compliance had improved, and found a 45% rate of discrimination against voucher holders in the District. Since that report, the ERC has continued its education and outreach efforts to landlords and apartment managers, resulting in agreements with at least five District housing providers, ensuring that more than 2,500 more apartment units are open to voucher holders.

The ERC is represented in this matter by the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs.

[Click here to read the ERC's 2011 report *Still in Search of Decent Housing: A Five Year Reflection on Discrimination Against Housing Choice Voucher Holders in the District of Columbia.*](#)

###

About the Equal Rights Center (www.equalrightscenter.org)

Originally formed in 1983, the Equal Rights Center (ERC) is a national non-profit civil rights organization based in Washington, D.C. With members located in 48 states and the District of Columbia, the ERC works nationally to promote equal opportunity in housing, employment, disability rights, immigrant rights, and access to public accommodations and government services for all protected classes under federal, state, and local laws.

About the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs (<http://www.washlaw.org/>)

The Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and 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.