



**For Immediate Release**

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## New Report Uncovers 31% Rate of Housing Discrimination against Individuals Using Guide Dogs

WASHINGTON, D.C., November 13, 2012– Today, the Equal Rights Center (ERC), released a report, “Misguided: Housing Discrimination Against Individuals Using Guide Dogs,” in which 31 percent of rental housing providers tested adversely treated a blind individual looking to rent an apartment and seeking an accommodation for a guide dog.

“Despite legal protections, thousands of individuals who use service animals encounter discrimination that acts as a barrier to their ability to secure safe and affordable housing, which has far reaching impact on their overall quality of life,” said Don Kahl, Executive Director of the Equal Rights Center. “Refusing to provide the legally required accommodation for a guide dog is simply unacceptable. By raising awareness about the issue, the ERC hopes to see the day when no individual with a disability is forced to choose between the use of their service animal and the ability to live in the home of their choice.”

Guide dogs, and other assistive animals, serve important functions and are not pets. Nonetheless, many rental properties with “no pets” policies, or pet restrictions that limit the type or size of animal allowed, apply those policies to service animals. Two federal laws, the Fair Housing Act (FHA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as well as many state and local laws, provide protections to people with disabilities in housing-related transactions, including the right to obtain a reasonable accommodation for the use of a service animal. Under the FHA and ADA, housing providers must make allowances for individuals who use service animals, despite any existing “no pets” policy for the property. Despite these protections, the ERC and its partners continue to hear of barriers for people with disabilities who use service and assistive animals.

“I have been told by more than one rental property manager that I could only live on the first floor because that is where the ‘disabled people’ live and that my guide dog could have an accident in the elevator,” said one member of the American Council of the Blind.

To measure the existence and extent of this discrimination, the ERC conducted 100 fair housing tests of rental properties throughout the greater Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. In 31 (31%) of these tests, a blind tester who called rental properties to inquire about housing was denied equal housing opportunity because of a guide dog. This treatment ranged from increased fees for having a guide dog, to a lack of knowledge on property policies involving service

animals, to outright refusals to allow a guide dog to live on the premises.

“It’s incredibly frustrating to hear from our members that they have been denied housing because staff at rental properties still don’t understand that a guide dog is not the same as somebody’s pet,” said Eric Bridges, Governmental Affairs Director of the American Council of the Blind.

In addition to presenting this data to educate housing providers, guide dog users, and the general public about this issue, the ERC has identified several recommendations to address the barriers uncovered in the report.

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**About the Equal Rights Center ([www.equalrightscenter.org](http://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 every state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, the ERC works nationally to promote equal opportunity in housing, employment, and access to public accommodations and government services for all protected classes under federal, state, and local laws.