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Contact:

Kate Walz, Director of Housing Justice
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
(312) 368-2679 (work)
(773) 793-3560 (mobile)

Current and Former Tenants Settle Discrimination Claims Against the City of Joliet, Illinois

Agreement Will Preserve Affordable Housing and Housing Choices for the Plaintiffs for the Next 20 years

A federal court today approved settlement of a lawsuit that will preserve the affordable housing rights of a group of former and current tenants of Evergreen Terrace, a federally subsidized affordable housing development in the City of Joliet, Illinois. The tenants had filed a housing discrimination and False Claims Act lawsuit against the city to resist the city's efforts to condemn the housing and displace the residents. The settlement will preserve the tenants' affordable housing and provide them with affordable housing choices for the next 20 years. Evergreen Terrace is a 356-unit affordable housing development currently operated by a private owner pursuant to a 20-year contract with HUD.

This settlement resolves the tenants' claims that the city had discriminated against African-Americans and families with children in violation of the Fair Housing Act when it attempted to condemn Evergreen Terrace. Today's settlement coordinates with a previously approved settlement of companion litigation. In November 2013, the U.S. Justice Department and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development settled a case with similar claims against the city, also involving the city's attempted condemnation of Evergreen Terrace. Those parties' settlement ensures that, if the city acquires the property, residents will be able to remain in affordable housing in Joliet, and at least 115 affordable units will continue to be available for families at the Evergreen Terrace property, or subject to HUD approval, elsewhere in Joliet. The tenants' settlement approved today provides that those current tenants will have a choice to remain onsite at Evergreen Terrace in their affordable housing units or to move to an affordable unit in the area. It also provides an opportunity for the former tenants' families to live in any redeveloped affordable units on the Evergreen Terrace site.

"We look forward to working with the City of Joliet towards the redevelopment of the Evergreen Terrace community for the benefit of the Evergreen Terrace residents. Our clients' settlement, with the DOJ and HUD settlement, will ensure that the low-income families at Evergreen Terrace will not be unlawfully displaced from their housing and will be able to remain in Joliet," said Kate Walz, of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, one of the trial lawyers for the current and former tenants. Reena Bajowala, a partner at Jenner and Block, LLP, led the tenants' trial team pro bono.

"This is my community and my home. My neighbors at Evergreen Terrace are like family to me and I am so glad that we will be able to stay," said Arnetris Renee Griffin, one of the tenants who sued the city for housing discrimination.



Teresa Davis, head of the Evergreen Terrace resident association and a plaintiff in the discrimination suit agrees. “Our goal with the litigation was to ensure that our community was not harmed or discriminated against and that families who need affordable housing have access to it. The settlement achieves those goals,” she said.

Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law (www.povertylaw.org)

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