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LAWSUIT FILED AGAINST BROOKLYN REAL ESTATE COMPANY FOR REFUSING TO SERVE AFRICAN AMERICANS

Today, Ms. Vanessa Lee, an African American woman, filed a lawsuit in federal court in the Eastern District of New York against Bais Seller Realty & Construction, Inc. of Brooklyn alleging that the company discriminated against her because of her race, color, and religion. The suit alleges that in 2007 the company refused to negotiate with Ms. Lee, to show her apartments to rent, and to provide any service to her. Ms. Lee is represented by Attorney Mariann Wang of Emery Celli Brinckerhoff & Abady LLP.

Specifically, the complaint alleges that when Ms. Lee called the company she was first told an apartment was available, then was asked if she was Jewish and after she said that she was not, was told that the apartment was *not* available for her to rent. Subsequently, when Ms. Lee went to the firm's offices in Brooklyn, she was informed that no one was available to show her apartments. Several hours after Ms. Lee's visit, the Fair Housing Justice Center (FHJC) sent a white female tester to the same office and she was told about and shown available apartments.

During a four month investigation conducted by the FHJC, four matched pairs of African American and white testers were sent to the office of Bais Realty to inquire about apartments for rent. The lawsuit alleges that on each occasion, the African American tester was denied service by Bais Realty while the white tester who visited the same office on the same day was informed about and/or shown available apartments.

"Forty years after the passage of a federal fair housing law, we find a real estate company in New York City systematically making housing unavailable by refusing to provide service to and negotiate with African Americans" stated Diane L. Houk, FHJC

Executive Director. Ms. Houk added, *“The testing investigation conducted by our organization amply demonstrates that, while this Realtor firm has affordable rental listings in various Brooklyn neighborhoods, it is their regular practice to deny service and housing to prospective renters on the basis of race.”*

In discussing the lawsuit, Attorney Wang stated, *“When a real estate company intentionally engages in a pattern of restricting access to housing on the basis of race, as is alleged in this complaint, it not only hurts those directly injured by these practices, but it is an affront to our entire community.”*

In the lawsuit, Ms. Lee is asking the court to find that the defendants have engaged in illegal housing discrimination, require the defendants to take all necessary steps to prevent future discrimination, and provide damages pursuant to federal, state and local fair housing laws.

The mission of the FHJC, which opened in April 2005, is to challenge systemic housing discrimination, promote open and inclusive communities, and strengthen fair housing enforcement.

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