



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Wednesday, December 15, 2010

WESTCHESTER TOWN ACCUSED OF HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

Lawsuit Claims Yorktown's Rent Assistance Program Discriminates Against African Americans and Hispanics

Today the Fair Housing Justice Center ("FHJC") filed a federal lawsuit against the Town of Yorktown, New York alleging Yorktown's Section 8 housing voucher program violates civil rights laws by discriminating against African Americans and Latinos. FHJC's complaint was filed in the Southern District of New York naming the Town of Yorktown, a predominately white northern Westchester County community, as a defendant.

FHJC alleges that Yorktown uses a seven-tiered preference system for issuing Section 8 housing vouchers which favors Yorktown residents and discourages most eligible African Americans and Latinos in Westchester County from even applying to the program.

The complaint also alleges that the Town 1) states on program documents there is an 8-15 year wait for non-residents as opposed to a 3-6 month wait for residents; 2) tells minorities inquiring about the program to apply to other communities in Westchester County with a higher minority population even when those programs' waiting lists are closed; 3) encourages elderly white renters even if they do not live in Yorktown to move to the Town to obtain a higher preference; and 4) fails to conduct outreach about the Section 8 program to Westchester County organizations serving minority renters as required by the federal government.

Gene Capello, Vice President of the FHJC Board of Directors and a long time Westchester resident said, "This is just the latest chapter in the story of racial discrimination in Westchester County. It is our hope that Yorktown stops its discriminatory practices and understands that a diverse community is a strong community." Mr. Capello added that "the FHJC hopes to hear from African Americans and Latinos who have tried without success to obtain rental assistance and move to the Town of Yorktown."

The lawsuit is based in part on information obtained by FHJC "testers" who contacted Yorktown's Section 8 Program to inquire about applying for a voucher. Before filing this lawsuit, FHJC informed Yorktown of the discriminatory nature of its residency preference scheme and Yorktown refused to open the program to persons of all races and national origins.

“Since Yorktown meets the criteria in the recent Westchester County consent decree with HUD to develop affordable housing units to promote racial integration, it is extremely important that the Town eliminate any barriers that exist in its housing programs,” said Diane L. Houk, Esq., with the law firm of Emery, Celli, Brinckerhoff, and Abady, LLP, who is representing the FHJC in this matter. According to Attorney Houk, “Far from meeting its legal duty to affirmatively further fair housing, Yorktown for over 30 years has applied a discriminatory residency preference and limited the supply of affordable housing opportunities. By restricting housing choices for lower-income minority families, the Town has reinforced existing patterns of racial and economic segregation.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Diane L. Houk, Esq.
Emery Celli Brinckerhoff & Abady LLP
75 Rockefeller Plaza, 20th Floor
New York, NY 10019
212-763-5000

About FHJC: The mission of the FHJC is to challenge systemic housing discrimination, promote open and inclusive communities, and strengthen fair housing enforcement. The FHJC assists individuals who encounter illegal housing discrimination by providing counseling on fair housing rights, investigative assistance and referrals to administrative agencies and cooperating attorneys. Individuals who encounter illegal housing discrimination are encouraged to call the FHJC at (212) 400-8201.