



Opening Acts

A Publication of the Fair Housing Justice Center Inc.

Brooklyn Landlord Accused of Renting to “Russians Only”

If you want to rent an apartment at 1777 Ocean Parkway in the predominately white Midwood area of Brooklyn, you have to be Russian. That’s what the Fair Housing Justice Center (FHJC) learned after completing a testing investigation in 2009. On Tuesday, May 25, 2010, the FHJC filed a lawsuit in federal court alleging that the owners and agents for the 76-unit apartment building in Brooklyn are discriminating based on race and national origin.

The lawsuit names the owner, 1777 Management Co. LLC, the on-site Super, his wife, and his adult son as defendants. The complaint alleges that on August 4, 2009, a white male tester met with the son of the building Super at 1777 Ocean Parkway and was asked, “Do you speak Russian?” The tester asked if the Super only spoke Russian and the Super’s son stated, “No, he speaks English...but I have to tell you the truth, the landlord here, he only rents out to Russian people.” When the tester pressed to see if he could view an available apartment, the Super’s son stated, “I can show it to you, but I’m telling you the landlord, he’s very reluctant to rent out, you know, because Russian people, they fix up the apartments for Americans, so you know what I mean so...it’s a good deal for him.” The Super’s son added, “The landlord’s not Russian, you know, but...I’m just telling you what he likes to do.”

The FHJC subsequently sent African American and Hispanic testers to the building to inquire about apartments along with a white female tester who spoke Russian and portrayed a woman who was married to a Russian man. All of the African American and Hispanic testers were told no apartments were available and were encouraged to look elsewhere for an apartment. The white female tester was told about two available apartments in the building and was encouraged to apply for an apartment at 1777 Ocean Parkway.

Although African American renters comprise 38% of the renter population in Brooklyn and Latino renters comprise 20%, 2000 Census data reveals that the neighborhood in which the apartment building is located has an African American renter population of 0% and a Hispanic renter population of only 4%.

FHJC President Bernhard Blythe commented, “When landlords illegally misrepresent the availability of apartments based on race and national origin, housing choice is restricted and our community is further divided. Fair housing laws require that housing opportunities are made available to everyone on an equal basis.”

The federal lawsuit seeks an injunction to stop the discrimination, relief to prevent future discriminatory acts, recovery of compensatory and punitive damages, and reasonable attorneys’ fees and costs. The FHJC is represented by the law firm of Emery Celli Brinckerhoff & Abady LLP.

Tuesday, May 25, 2010

Tickets Still Available for FHJC’s Acting for Justice Awards Reception

FHJC’s 2nd Annual Acting for Justice Awards is happening on June 3, 2010 from 6-8 p.m. at the Metropolitan Pavilion located at 124 W. 18th Street in Manhattan. Tickets (\$50) can still be purchased online at www.fairhousingjustice.org/event or by calling (212) 400-8201. Plan to join other FHJC supporters for an evening of live jazz, good food and drink, a moving civil rights photo exhibit called “*Chicago’s Freedom Movement, 1965-1966*,” and much more.