



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
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## **LAWSUIT AGAINST REAL ESTATE BROKER AND HOUSING COOPERATIVES ALLEGES RACIAL DISCRIMINATION**

Today, the Fair Housing Justice Center (FHJC) announced the filing of a federal race discrimination lawsuit against a real estate broker, Amelia Lewis, and two housing cooperatives, Silver Beach Gardens Corporation and Edgewater Park Owners Cooperative, Inc., located in the Throgs Neck area of the Bronx, New York. The suit alleges that both housing cooperatives utilize a policy requiring buyers to have three (3) letters of reference from existing shareholders to purchase a house in the co-ops. The suit also alleges that, while African Americans own 35% of all owner-occupied housing units in the Bronx, less than 1% of the more than 1100 single-family homes in Silver Beach Gardens and Edgewater Park are owned by African Americans.

In 2009, the FHJC conducted a testing investigation into the sales practices of Amelia Lewis, who has allegedly sold homes in the two co-ops for 45 years. FHJC sent a white couple and a comparably qualified African American couple to Ms. Lewis' real estate office to inquire about purchasing a home in the co-ops. The complaint alleges that Ms. Lewis told the white testers about available co-op homes in both Silver Beach Gardens and Edgewater Park, arranged for white testers to view homes for sale in their price range, and encouraged them to purchase a home in these neighborhoods. According to the complaint, when the white couple told Ms. Lewis that they did not know anyone currently residing in the co-op neighborhoods, the broker told them not to worry because the seller could provide one reference letter, even without meeting the white couple, and the broker would assist them to obtain the remaining required letters from other shareholders.

When Ms. Lewis met with the African American tester couple, she refused to show them any available homes in either Edgewater Park or Silver Beach Gardens. The complaint alleges that Ms. Lewis told the African American couple that they would not be happy living in the co-ops because the people there are "prejudiced" and "it's like Archie Bunker territory." The complaint further alleges that Ms. Lewis told the African American couple that it would be impossible for them to obtain the three required reference letters since they did not know any

current co-op shareholder and she did not offer to assist them. Instead, Ms. Lewis steered the African American couple to a single family home that was in disrepair and above their price range located outside of the co-ops in a more racially diverse neighborhood in the Bronx, according to the complaint.

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 plaintiffs, FHJC and the two African American testers, are represented by the law firm of Emery Celli Brinckerhoff and Abady LLP.

FHJC Board President Bernhard Blythe stated, "February is the month we celebrate and acknowledge the contributions and advancements of African Americans in our country. It is fitting then, that we also continue to advance the causes for which so many are recognized, including Martin Luther King, Jr's struggle against housing discrimination and segregation. Thanks in no small part to Dr. King's legacy, we have laws that make it illegal for real estate agents and co-op boards to adopt policies or engage in practices that allow race to be a factor in deciding whether someone is qualified to purchase a home in our nation." Blythe added, "As an organization, we honor Dr. King's memory and all those who fought for such laws by enforcing our fair housing rights and directly challenging housing discrimination in our community."

Attorney Diane L. Houk stated, "Whether discrimination takes the form of overt racial steering or adoption of facially neutral policies that effectively exclude people based on race, the fair housing laws are very clear--all racial discrimination in housing is prohibited."

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 (including testing), and referrals to administrative agencies and cooperating attorneys. Persons who encounter illegal housing discrimination are encouraged to call the FHJC at (212) 400-8201.

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