

Housing Research & Advocacy Center
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**Housing Group, Ohio Civil Rights Commission Settle
Federal Housing Discrimination Suit with Cleveland Developers, Architects
Defendants Agree to Make Units in Stonebridge Complex
Accessible to Persons with Disabilities**

CLEVELAND, OH – The Housing Research & Advocacy Center, a Cleveland-based non-profit fair housing group, today announced the settlement of a housing discrimination lawsuit alleging disability discrimination by the designers and builders of a Cleveland apartment and condominium complex. The lawsuit was filed in federal court in 2009 by the Housing Research & Advocacy Center against the K & D Group and others responsible for designing and constructing the Stonebridge apartments and condominiums, located on the west bank of the Cuyahoga River in downtown Cleveland. The Ohio Civil Rights Commission joined the lawsuit, after finding probable cause that a number of the defendants had violated state accessibility laws.

Plaintiffs' experts had found over 600 violations of federal and state accessibility requirements in the three Stonebridge residential buildings. The defendants, while denying violating federal and state law in the stipulated judgment approved by United States District Court Judge Dan Polster on June 9, 2011, will make numerous alterations to the properties, including making all common areas and all 107 apartment units located in the Stonebridge Waterfront building accessible for people with disabilities. In addition, defendants will retrofit the common areas and 12 condominium units in the Stonebridge Plaza building to ensure compliance with the law. Defendants will also pay \$567,000 in damages, costs, and attorneys fees.

Among the inaccessible features that will be retrofitted are:

- interior and exterior doors that are too narrow to accommodate persons in wheelchairs;
- clear floor space in bathrooms and kitchens that are inadequate for use by persons in wheelchairs;
- inaccessible routes leading to building entrances;
- light switches, outlets, and environmental controls that are out of reach for persons in wheelchairs;
- inadequate handicapped parking.

Jeffrey D. Dillman, Executive Director of the Housing Center, stated, "Accessible housing is an essential means of ensuring that people with disabilities are able to fully participate in community life. This settlement sends a strong message that those who design and construct housing units cannot ignore their obligation to make them accessible to persons with disabilities."

The Housing Center was represented in the case by Diane Citrino, with Cleveland-based Thacker Martinsek, and the Washington, D.C.-based civil rights law firm Relman, Dane & Colfax. The Ohio Civil Rights Commission was represented by Marilyn Tobocman, Principal Assistant Attorney General with the Ohio Attorney General's Office. The Housing Center's initial research and testing in this case was done under a grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

According to 2008 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 182,022 individuals in Cuyahoga County with a disability, including 17,148 under the age 18, 92,746 aged 18-64, and 72,128 aged 65 and over. These numbers are expected to increase as the population ages, wounded veterans return from Iraq and Afghanistan and medical care allows people with disabilities to live longer and fuller lives.

Federal law prohibits discrimination in the rental or sale of housing, and in the mortgage lending and homeowners insurance markets, based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, familial status and handicap. In addition, Ohio law prohibits discrimination based on ancestry and military status. Among other things, federal and state law requires that multifamily housing developments built after 1988 be designed and constructed with basic accessibility features, including usable doors, kitchens, and bathrooms, reinforced walls for grab bars, and accessible and usable public and common use areas.

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The Housing Research & Advocacy Center is a nonprofit fair housing organization whose mission is to eliminate housing discrimination and assure choice in Northeast Ohio by providing those at risk with effective information, intervention and advocacy. The Housing Center is a member of Greater Cleveland Community Shares.

Persons who believe they have been discriminated against may contact the Housing Center at (216) 361-9240.