



For immediate release
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Connecticut Fair Housing Center Settles Suit Against Winchester Housing Authority for Discriminatory Residency Requirement

On November 14, 2013, the Connecticut Fair Housing Center and Crystal Carter, represented by Relman, Dane & Colfax, settled a lawsuit against the Winchester Housing Authority (WHA). The lawsuit alleged an unlawful “residency requirement” used by the WHA to intentionally discriminate against African-American and Hispanic persons attempting to apply for admission to its Section 8 program. The case was settled for \$350,000 and put in place a consent decree or settlement agreement.

Crystal Carter, the individual plaintiff, was a homeless single mother of six children staying with her father in crowded and unsatisfactory housing. When she learned that the WHA’s waiting list was open, she immediately contacted the housing authority to request an application. Ms. Carter informed the housing authority that she wanted to apply to the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program. In response, the authority told Ms. Carter that it was not sending applications to people who did not reside in the seventeen overwhelmingly white communities in northwest Connecticut it served. Ms. Carter was also told that Winchester was not on a bus line, that there were no jobs in Winchester, and that Winchester was “in the woods.” She was advised that it would be better for her to apply to Section 8 programs in cities such as Bridgeport, New Haven and Torrington.

After attempting to remedy the situation with the Department of Housing and Urban Development and trying unsuccessfully to work with the WHA, Ms. Carter contacted the Connecticut Fair Housing Center. The Center began investigating and soon confirmed the existence of an unlawful residency requirement.

The lawsuit alleged an unlawful residency requirement used by the WHA to intentionally discriminate not only against Ms. Carter, who is African American, but also against African-American and Hispanic persons in general who were attempting to apply for admission to its Section 8 program. The residency requirement only allowed individuals from the seventeen northwest Connecticut towns to apply for its Section 8 program. Residency requirements are prohibited by the Section 8 program. Moreover, because the populations of the seventeen towns are more than 90% White, the WHA’s illegal residency requirement favored White applicants and excluded most African-American and Hispanic families from any chance of participating in

its Section 8 program. In response to this lawsuit, the WHA terminated its residency requirement.

As part of the negotiated settlement, the WHA has agreed to treat all Section 8 applicants, regardless of town of residency, on equal footing in its administration of public housing. The WHA has also agreed to undergo fair housing training, to notify all future applicants of their fair housing rights, and to generally abide by the Fair Housing Act.

Finally, in response to this lawsuit, the WHA is engaged in a process to permanently terminate its administration of the Section 8 program.

“Housing segregation is a pervasive and persistent problem in Connecticut as evidenced by the few people of color living in the area served by the Winchester Housing Authority and its partners. The Center looks forward to working with the town of Winchester and the other towns in Litchfield County to ensure that all Connecticut residents are able to take advantage of the safe neighborhoods, high quality schools and rural character that is the hallmark of these towns,” said Erin Kemple, Executive Director of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center.

Since the filing of this lawsuit, Ms. Carter has successfully obtained a Housing Choice Voucher from another housing authority and used the voucher to obtain safe, suitable housing.

Ms. Carter, upon hearing the news of the settlement, said, “The last two years have been a very difficult time for me and my children, and with the help of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center, and my own persistence, I have overcome. I am no longer homeless, I am working, and I am living a productive life. I want to let anyone who has been homeless know that there is light at the end of the tunnel – never give up, push forward and anything can happen.”

The litigation team was led by attorneys John Relman, Jia Cobb, Timothy Smyth, and paralegal Allison Pincus from Relman, Dane & Colfax and attorney Greg Kirschner from the Connecticut Fair Housing Center.