



CT FAIR HOUSING CENTER

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- **Recent Fair Housing Victories**

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Connecticut Choices

Moving Gave Him The Chance He Needed

Ernest Cameron spent his adult life bouncing from shelters, his parents' house to the streets.

After several missteps, he set about changing his life – and he knew he had a better chance if he could get out of the city and away from his old life. First in one apartment and then another, he lived with bedbugs, violence, discrimination and open drug dealing. By the time he came to the Center for help in 2006, his physical disabilities had severely limited his ability to walk, and therefore, to work. He was also diagnosed with agoraphobia (an anxiety disorder characterized by fear of open spaces and bridges) which was exacerbated by the conditions of his living situation. He was living on his Social Security income and had a housing voucher.

By working with the Manchester Housing Authority, D'Amelia and Associates, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Center's attorneys, Greg Kirschner and Tim Bennett-Smyth were able to move him into an accessible apartment in East Hartford that accommodates his disabilities and offers relief from the crime and poverty of the streets on which he grew up. He moved in on October first.

Shortly after moving he said, "I love my apartment, I love how quiet it is, and how clean and peaceful. I don't hear gunshots anymore and I feel completely safe there. I've lost a few pounds because there's a fitness center in the building, and I'm working out every day. I belonged to the YMCA when I lived in Hartford, but it took me two buses to get there, and I just couldn't do it. Now I can do it every day, which is helping my back, and making me feel better about myself – I'm even eating better!"

Mr. Cameron testified despite great personal discomfort during the 2011 legislative session. He did it because, as he says, "If it wasn't for the Center, no one like me would have a place to go, people with no money for lawyers, people who don't know their rights, we'd have no place to go." He said he prepared for weeks before the testimony, praying that the panic attacks caused by his disability wouldn't occur.

"I was scared, but I have to challenge myself, and I knew that I needed to stand up for the work the Center does. I still can't walk across a bridge, but I knew I had to speak on behalf of the lawyers who helped me so much. Without Greg and Tim I wouldn't be here."

"I'd probably still be doing

drugs and hanging on the streets if it weren't for the Center. I hope to be where I am for a long, long time...my next move is going to be a house, and maybe I'll have a family someday."

Mr. Cameron still can't walk across a bridge, but he has taken the extraordinary first steps toward full recovery and hope for a better life.

He credits Greg and Tim for giving him the chance to move to a higher opportunity area – "It's 90% them and 10% me."

But we would disagree, and give Ernest Cameron the 90%, and humbly take 10% for providing him with the legal assistance he needed.



Ernest Cameron outside his new apartment.

Foreclosure Clinic Class Schedule

Hartford

Classes are held every 3rd Tuesday at the University High School of Science and Engineering, 351 Mark Twain Drive in Hartford, beginning at 5:30 p.m.

An attorney from the Center's Foreclosure Prevention Staff, one of the court's foreclosure mediators, and a representative from the State Department of Banking present information and answer questions about the foreclosure process.

Those interested may then meet with a volunteer attorney, paralegal, law student, or paralegal student to discuss their situation and obtain general advice about the foreclosure process.

Fairfield County

Classes are held on the 3rd Wednesday of every month rotating between Norwalk, Bridgeport, and Stamford. The classes begin at 6:00 p.m. For a complete list and the locations, call the Center at (860) 247-4400 or go to www.ctfairhousing.org to find the schedule of foreclosure prevention classes in Fairfield County.

New Foreclosure Attorneys

We are pleased to announce that attorneys Pamela A. Heller and Jill Lacedonia have joined the Center's Foreclosure Prevention staff. Their presence will substantially increase our ability to respond to the growing number of calls we get from homeowners facing foreclosure. They will also assist in the self-representation classes that are held state-wide, other education and outreach efforts, and litigation and advocacy on behalf of clients. Both of our new staff attorney positions were



made possible through a generous grant from the Department of Banking.

Prior to joining the Center, Ms. Heller (pictured left) worked as a law clerk to the Honorable Ellen Ash Peters and the Honorable William J. Sullivan at the Connecticut Appellate Court and as a legal research clerk at the Connecticut Superior Court. Ms. Heller received both her JD and MSW from the University of Connecticut, and her BA from Stanford University. Ms. Heller joins the Center with experience serving clients at Connecticut Legal Services, as well as experience in policy and legislative advocacy.

Jill Lacedonia (pictured right) worked for four years as a law clerk in federal district court in New Haven, first for Senior United States District Judge Peter C. Dorsey and then for Senior

United States District Judge Charles S. Haight, Jr. Before clerking, she was an associate at Day Pitney, LLP in Hartford. A Connecticut native, Ms. Lacedonia graduated summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Wellesley College and received her J.D. from New York University School of Law. Ms. Lacedonia interned with the State Attorney General's office and the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut. She is a former board member of Love Makes a Family.



Foreclosure Procedures Change

Thanks to the Center's legislative advocacy during the 2011 session in Hartford, homeowners participating in foreclosure mediation now receive a reprieve from bank litigation for up to eight months.

The new legislation, which includes other improvements to mediation, arose from the Center's discussions with thousands of homeowners and attorneys throughout the state who represent homeowners. The Center helped shape the legislation

through meetings with legislators, representatives from the mortgage industry, and testimony at public hearings.

An updated version of the Center's manual for self-represented homeowners explains the changes to the law and how these changes affect the foreclosure process.

To get a copy of *Representing Yourself in Foreclosure: A Guide for Connecticut Homeowners*, call Letty at (860)247-4400 or go to

New Clinic Classes Added

Working in conjunction with the ROOF Project in New Haven, the Connecticut Fair Housing Center's foreclosure prevention attorneys will now be holding additional monthly clinic classes in three locations in New Haven County.

The classes will start at 5:30 and run until 7:30 and will rotate between Meriden, Milford and East Haven. The next class will be held on Tuesday, December 6 in East Haven. For a full schedule go to www.theroofproject.org.

Brother and Sister Want to Stay in Apartment

In August 2011, the Center received a call from a brother and sister, both in their 70's, who live together in subsidized housing. They are happy in their apartment, and proud that they are able to live independently. The woman is undergoing chemotherapy, and her brother uses a wheelchair.

As a result, the two need overnight care.

Unfortunately, their landlord attempted to evict them for having an "unauthorized" person living with them in violation of the lease. When it was explained to the landlord that their disabilities required overnight care, the landlord

suggested that they go into a nursing home.

Thanks to the intervention of the Center's attorneys, the eviction was withdrawn and the siblings continue to live in their apartment with the care they need. A federal lawsuit regarding their right to overnight assistance is ongoing.

The 3rd Annual Tester Appreciation Dinner

On November 30th, the Center will honor six of its fair housing testers. These six women have shown a long-term dedication to the important housing anti-discrimination work they do for us. The Center's testing program is the only one of its kind in the state, and their testing, reporting and objective testimony in court often proves to be the crucial determinant in a successful housing discrimination case.

The winners of the 2011 Tester Appreciation Awards will enjoy a dinner and award ceremony at the Pond House in West Hartford, where the Center's attorneys will present several of our cases in which testing played a key role.

We will also hear from a former awardee who has worked with the Center for over a decade, and who will share her experiences – both challenges and



victories – with the newer testers.

Testing coordinator, Claudia Dresser (pictured above) will be at the event to help thank testers. She can be contacted at cdresser@ctfairhousing.org.

Make a Difference, Fight Housing Discrimination

What is fair housing testing?

Testing is designed to determine whether people looking for housing are treated differently.

Can anyone apply?

Yes, so long as you have voicemail or an answering machine, and are thorough and objective.

Do I need training?

The Connecticut Fair Housing Center will provide training in advance of any testing.

What is the time commitment?

The time commitment can vary depending on your schedule and interest, and the Center's testing needs.

Will I be paid for my work?

Yes. The Center provides its testers with a small stipend and provides reimbursement for mileage.

How do I apply?

Contact:

Maria Cuerda at mcurda@ctfairhousing.org

Recent Fair Housing Victories

Gashi v. Grubb & Ellis—On June 23, 2011, the Connecticut Federal District Court held that the defendants' policy of permitting no more than two people per bedroom in units was discriminatory against families with children. This decision has already had a significant impact in opening up more housing to families with children. The parties have since reached a confidential settlement on the remainder of the Gashi's claims.

Bilbo v. Hylton—In September, the Department of Housing and Urban Development issued a finding of reasonable cause on the Bilbo's discrimination claim. The Center's clients are an interracial couple who attempted to sublet their home to an African-American woman and her children. The landlord refused to allow the plaintiffs to rent to her because he did not want "too many blacks" in the neighborhood, stating he thought the neighbors would object. The case will be filed in federal court.

Burney v. Luth—In another racial discrimination case, Ms. Burney claimed that Mr. Luth would not rent to her because she is African-American. On the eve of trial, the Center settled this case for \$15,000 in damages for the client, attorneys' fees and an agreement not to discriminate in the future.

Connecticut Fair Housing Center

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Text by the Staff of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center

The Connecticut Fair Housing Center is a statewide non-profit fair housing organization dedicated to ensuring that all people, and principally those with scarce financial resources, have equal access to housing opportunities in Connecticut.

To accomplish its mission, the Center provides legal assistance and investigative services to the Connecticut residents who believe they may have been the victim of housing discrimination, education and outreach on the fair housing laws, strategic planning and advice on how to comply with the fair housing laws to cities and towns, and foreclosure prevention legal assistance. To learn more about our organization, go to www.ctfairhousing.org.

Visit us on-line at
www.ctfairhousing.org

Center and Trinity Present on Race, Historical Segregation

"No persons of any race except the white race shall use or occupy any building on any lot except that this covenant shall not prevent occupancy by domestic servants of a different race employed by an owner or tenant." West Hartford, CT, 1940

Professor Jack Dougherty from Trinity College discovered this "Racial Covenant" while researching his web book "On The Line: How Schooling, Housing, and Civil Rights Shaped Hartford and its Suburbs." The Center's Erin Boggs and Professor Dougherty discussed the connection between historical discriminatory practices and

current discriminatory housing patterns at the Connecticut Housing Coalition's 2011 Annual Conference.

Practices such as racial covenants, zoning restrictions and redlining helped to create current racial segregation. Initiated in the 1930s, redlining was a rating system developed by the Federal Government that determined that the presence of minorities created less stable neighborhoods. These ratings made it virtually impossible for people of color to get a home loan.

"People, Place and Opportunity", the report the Center commissioned from

the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in 2010 showed that 100% of Hartford-area neighborhoods that were redlined in 1937 were found to be "very low opportunity" areas. 81% of African-Americans and 79% of Latinos, as compared with only 25% of whites and 44% of Asians, are currently residing in lower opportunity neighborhoods with high levels of crime and poverty and struggling schools.

For more on Jack Dougherty's web book, go to:

www.ontheline.trincoll.edu.

For more on the Center Opportunity Mapping Project, go to: www.ctfairhousing.org.

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