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JUSTICE NEWS

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Justice Department Resolves Disability Discrimination Lawsuit Against Fitchburg, Massachusetts, Housing Authority

WASHINGTON –The Justice Department today announced that it has reached an agreement resolving its lawsuit against the Fitchburg, Mass., Housing Authority and its executive director, Robert W. Hill. The lawsuit alleged that the Fitchburg Housing Authority and Hill violated the Fair Housing Act by adopting and implementing policies that denied tenants with disabilities other than mobility impairments the opportunity to transfer between apartments within Fitchburg's public housing neighborhoods.

"The Fair Housing Act requires equal access to housing for persons with disabilities," said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "This comprehensive settlement will ensure equal access to housing for all disabled individuals, not just those who are substantially limited in the major life activity of walking."

Under the terms of the settlement, which must still be approved by the U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts, the defendants must establish a \$65,000 settlement fund to compensate persons who may have been injured by their alleged discriminatory conduct. The settlement also requires employees of the Fitchburg Housing Authority to receive training on the prohibition of disability discrimination under federal fair housing laws. Additionally, the Fitchburg Housing Authority must implement nondiscrimination and reasonable accommodation policies, and a procedure by which tenants may file a disability discrimination complaint against and employee or agent of the authority.

This case originated when a former resident of the Fitchburg Housing Authority filed a discrimination complaint with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD conducted an investigation and referred the matter to the Justice Department. The former resident resolved her claims against the Fitchburg Housing Authority in an out-of-court settlement.

The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability and familial status. More information about the Civil Rights Division and the laws it enforces is available at the website www.justice.gov/crt. Individuals who believe that they have been victims of housing discrimination can call the Housing Discrimination Tip Line at 1-800-896-7743, email the Justice Department at fairhousing@usdoj.gov, or contact HUD at 1-800-669-9777.

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Civil Rights Division