

GEORGIA LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAM, INC.

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GEORGIA LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAM REPRESENTATION YIELDS HUD APPROVAL OF \$80,000 SETTLEMENT RESOLVING FAIR HOUSING ACT ALLEGATIONS THAT SAVANNAH LANDLORD FAILED TO ADDRESS SYSTEMIC TENANT-ON-TENANT RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

SAVANNAH, GA: In resolution of allegations of Fair Housing Act violations at The Woods of Savannah, Gene B. Glick Company, Inc., agreed to pay a total of \$80,000 and make systemic changes in the company's nondiscrimination policy, procedure, and trainings.

The Woods of Savannah is a project-based Section 8 housing complex for individuals 62+ years of age or disabled. Gene B. Glick Company, Inc., owns and manages The Woods of Savannah and Oglethorpe Square Apartments, A Limited Partnership, along with 100+ other low-income housing communities in the Southeast and the Midwest.

In early 2018, three single, disabled, African-American women approached the Savannah Regional Office of the Georgia Legal Services Program ("GLSP") for assistance with the living conditions at The Woods of Savannah. White tenants started harassing the women the day each moved into the housing complex—before the other residents knew anything about the women other than the color of their skin. White residents used dogs to threaten the women and block their access to the housing complex's common areas. Among other forms of harassment, the women also endured racial slurs, physical threats, stalking, harassment at work, and being the subject of false reports to the police.

The women submitted dozens of complaints to the property's local and corporate management. In response, they were told the incidents were mere squabbles between neighbors and were warned to stop lodging complaints or they would face possible eviction. The women came to GLSP because they wanted the harassment to stop.

The Fair Housing Act protects against discrimination, in most private and public housing, based on a person's race, color, religion, sex, physical or mental impairment, familial status, or national origin. Under the Fair Housing Act, a landlord can be held liable for tenant-on-tenant race-based harassment when the landlord knew or should have known of the discriminatory conduct and the landlord failed to take prompt reasonable action to correct and stop the discriminatory conduct.

GLSP attorney Alison Slagowitz, Equal Justice Works Georgia Housing Corps Fellow, investigated and documented the harassment before drafting and submitting Fair Housing Act complaints for each client to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”). Once HUD assigned a conciliator and investigator, Ms. Slagowitz provided HUD a detailed investigation report, timelines of major incidents of harassment, documentary evidence, and a legal memo supporting assigning liability to the housing provider for the tenant-on-tenant race-based harassment at The Woods of Savannah.

The parties reached a settlement through HUD’s conciliation process that provided both individual relief to GLSP’s three clients and systemic relief to ensure any future complaints of racial harassment would be properly addressed by Gene B. Glick Company, Inc. Each of GLSP’s three clients received \$20,000. Further, Gene B. Glick Company, Inc., must create a \$20,000 compensation fund for current and prior residents of The Woods of Savannah affected by the hostile environment created by race-based discrimination. Additionally, the company must submit to HUD for approval a new nondiscrimination policy and procedure, in English and Spanish. Once approved by HUD, this writing must then be distributed to all employees and residents and prominently displayed in all properties owned and managed by Gene B. Glick Company, Inc. The Company will also provide annual mandatory employee trainings on anti-discrimination laws and trainings for residents on diversity, inclusion, and creating a community of respect.

GLSP’s Executive Director Rick Rufolo said, “This is a very meaningful result both for our clients and the community. The amount of damages for each client could produce a real change in their lives to help bring them out of poverty.”

“Landlords have a duty to provide tenants with an equal opportunity to use and fully enjoy safe and secure housing. This result will be a wake-up call to those landlords who do not know they can be held liable for tenant-on-tenant race-based harassment,” said Alison Slagowitz, Equal Justice Works Georgia Housing Corps Fellow hosted by the Savannah Regional Office of GLSP.