

For Immediate Release

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WILMETTE COOPERATIVE OPERATING AS 'HOUSING FOR OLDER PERSONS'
Interfaith Housing Center & Illinois Department of Human Rights Settle Fair Housing Suit

Winnetka, Illinois – The Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs announces the settlement of a three-year fair housing complaint against the 1630 Sheridan Road Corporation, a 104-unit cooperative in Wilmette along Lake Michigan.

Interfaith filed its complaint in May 2006 against the owners and board of directors alleging discriminatory policies relating to the familial status of prospective condo owners. This cooperative has agreed to be operated as “housing for older persons” as a facility that is “intended and operated for occupancy by persons 55 years of age or older.”

A real estate agent from Baird & Warner contacted Interfaith in the summer of 2005 when her clients were frustrated in their attempt to sell a unit in the building to a family with two young children. The cooperative’s “Rules We Live By” explicitly stated, “This community is not considered suitable for children under 18 years of age. It is the residents’ responsibility to communicate this information to a prospective purchaser either directly or through a realtor.” Since 1630 Sheridan Road Corporation was not a legally designated senior building, Interfaith alleged that this “rule” was in violation of the familial status protection under federal and state fair housing laws.

Interfaith, a 36-year-old U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-funded fair housing enforcement agency, filed a fair housing complaint with HUD which assigned the case to the Illinois Department of Human Rights (IDHR) in May 2006. In 2007, IDHR concluded its investigation with a finding of “substantial evidence.” The Attorney General’s office, representing IDHR, filed a complaint and Interfaith intervened in the action.

The settlement, reached on November 25, 2008, includes removal of the “Rules We Live By” language and its replacement in all legal documents declaring the building’s designation as housing intended and operated for older persons, \$20,000 to Interfaith, \$8,000 as a civil penalty, mandatory fair housing training, ongoing monitoring, and fair housing advertising within the building, to all residents and prospective residents, and full-page ads in the Wilmette newspaper regarding compliance with the Fair Housing Act.

“This case should send a message to all homeowners’ associations that discrimination against families with children is absolutely prohibited without an explicit HUD exemption. Moreover, many of these lakefront buildings and other suburban developments have a reputation for exclusivity to the point that families do not even think to apply. All housing developments need to make an

affirmative effort to project themselves as welcoming to all,” says Gail Schechter, Executive Director of the Interfaith Housing Center.

The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, and familial status. In addition, Illinois protects individuals from housing discrimination on the basis of age, marital status, sexual orientation, ancestry, unfavorable discharge from the military or military status.

The John Marshall Fair Housing Legal Clinic represented Interfaith in the settlement. Interfaith’s initial complaint was initially filed by the Chicago Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.

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About the Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs

The Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs is a nonprofit organization that advocates for fair and affordable housing in 16 northern suburbs of Chicago. It counts among its membership congregations and civic organizations throughout the region. Based in Winnetka, Illinois, it has been fulfilling its mission to foster a housing market open to people of all ages and income levels, regardless of race, religion, family composition, or any other legally protected classes, since 1972.

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