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Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, August 29, 2011

**Justice Department Obtains \$70,000 Settlement in Housing Discrimination Lawsuit Against New Orleans Landlords**

WASHINGTON – The Justice Department announced today that New Orleans landlords Betty Bouchon, the Bouchon Limited Family Partnership and Sapphire Corp., have agreed to pay \$70,000 in damages and civil penalties to settle a lawsuit alleging they unlawfully denied housing to African-American prospective renters at a 16-unit apartment building located in New Orleans. The settlement must still be approved by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana.

“In these challenging economic times, it is more important than ever that all Americans be able to rent or buy housing they can afford, and not face discrimination because of the color of their skin,” said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. “This settlement demonstrates the Department’s commitment to ensuring equal housing opportunity for persons in the city of New Orleans and throughout the United States.”

“The right of all of our citizens to enjoy fair and equal access to housing opportunities is guaranteed by our laws,” said U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Louisiana Jim Letten. “The U.S. Department of Justice is committed to fiercely protecting those rights in order to insure the quality of life all Americans deserve. I am once again grateful to Assistant Attorney General Tom Perez and the Civil Rights Division for their partnership in this and other critical endeavors in defending these precious civil rights.”

The settlement would resolve a lawsuit filed today by the department alleging that the defendants discriminated against African-Americans seeking housing at the apartment building in violation of the federal Fair Housing Act. The allegations are based on fair-housing testing conducted by the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center (GNOFHAC). The lawsuit alleges that the building manager, Betty Bouchon, failed to return phone calls from African-American testers while returning phone calls from white testers, made statements to white testers indicating that she would not rent to African-Americans, and falsely told an African-American tester that an apartment was not available for rent when in fact it was available.

Under the terms of the settlement, the defendants will pay \$50,000 to GNOFHAC and a total of \$20,000 in civil penalties to the United States. The settlement also requires the defendants to adopt non-discriminatory policies and procedures, keep detailed records of inquiries from prospective tenants and of rental transactions, and submit periodic reports over the four year term of the settlement. GNOFHAC filed a separate lawsuit, which is pending in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana.

Fighting illegal housing discrimination is a top priority of the Justice Department. 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 [www.usdoj.gov/crt](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt). Individuals who believe that they may have been victims of housing discrimination should call the Housing Discrimination Tip Line at 1-800-896-7743, mailbox number 9998 or e-mail the Justice Department at [fairhousing@usdoj.gov](mailto:fairhousing@usdoj.gov). Individuals who believe they may have been victims of housing discrimination may also contact HUD at 1-800-669-9777. Further information about the Fair Housing Act is available at [www.usdoj.gov/fairhousing](http://www.usdoj.gov/fairhousing) or at [www.hud.gov](http://www.hud.gov).

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Civil Rights Division


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