

GREATER
NEW ORLEANS



FAIR
HOUSING
ACTION CENTER

PRESS RELEASE

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FAIR HOUSING CENTER SEEKS REPEAL OF ST. BERNARD PARISH MULTI-FAMILY MORATORIUM

The Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center (GNOFHAC) filed a motion today seeking enforcement of a Consent Order entered on February 27, 2008, in Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center v. St. Bernard Parish et al, Case No. 06-7185, United States District Court, Eastern District of Louisiana. GNOFHAC's motion alleges that St. Bernard Parish's recently enacted moratorium on multi-family housing violates the Consent Order, which enjoins the Parish from violating the Fair Housing Act and other civil rights laws that prohibit race discrimination.

Little more than seven (7) months after the Consent Decree was entered, the Parish adopted an ordinance placing a year-long moratorium on all multi-family developments with five (5) or more units. This moratorium is almost identical to one of the ordinances challenged in GNOFHAC's lawsuit against the Parish, which was filed shortly after the storm and which also challenged the Parish's "blood relative" rental ordinance.

St. Bernard's moratorium on multi-family housing violates the Fair Housing Act because it is a restrictive zoning measure that has the intent and effect of discriminating against minorities. The moratorium chokes off rental housing desperately needed since the storm – and disproportionately needed by minorities. In St. Bernard, only 20% of whites were renters prior to the storm, while the figure was 45% for Blacks and 31% for Hispanics. 3,935 units of affordable rental housing in St. Bernard Parish were severely damaged by the storm. Restricting the availability of rental housing, especially affordable rental housing, has a disproportionate impact upon minorities and perpetuates the Parish's history as a segregated, predominantly white community.

Today's filing asks the court to suspend the discriminatory ordinance and seeks a hearing as to whether the Parish can show cause why it should not be held in contempt. Representing the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center are the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, a national civil rights organization, and the Washington DC law firm Relman & Dane PLLC. The Dallas law firm Munsch Hardt Kopf & Harr, P.C., along with Relman & Dane PLLC, represent a developer who has applied to intervene in the prior case.

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“Despite being forced to repeal an earlier discriminatory zoning ordinance and agreeing to adhere to the Fair Housing Act, St. Bernard Parish seems determined to ignore the law and to perpetuate housing discrimination in our community,” said James Perry, Executive Director of the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center. “We will not tolerate exclusionary zoning measures that deny equal housing opportunities to minorities in St. Bernard Parish, or anywhere else in the greater New Orleans area.”

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The Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center (GNOFHAC) is a private non-profit organization. The Center was established by a group of concerned New Orleanians in 1995 with the help of the National Fair Housing Alliance. GNOFHAC is dedicated to eliminating housing discrimination and furthering equal housing opportunities through education, outreach, advocacy, and enforcement of fair housing laws across the metro New Orleans and Baton Rouge areas. This is an independent agency based event/litigation. Therefore, It is not funded with Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP) funds or sponsored/ authorized by the Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity.