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**NYC COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS CHARGES FIVE LARGE LANDLORDS AND BROKERS CONTROLLING APPROXIMATELY 20,000 UNITS CITYWIDE WITH DISCRIMINATION FOR REPEATEDLY REFUSING TO ACCEPT HOUSING VOUCHERS**

*Commission has significantly increased enforcement of “source of income” discrimination protections under Mayor de Blasio and filed the highest number of public and Commissioned-initiated complaints in its history in 2016 with more than 120 new complaints filed*

*Commission revitalized its testing program in 2016, performing more than 300 tests for source of income housing discrimination citywide*

**NEW YORK** – The NYC Commission on Human Rights announces today five complaints filed against large landlords and brokerage firms for repeatedly discriminating against prospective tenants based on their lawful source of income, a violation of the NYC Human Rights Law. The complaints, which the Commission filed on behalf of the City, followed investigations proactively conducted by the Commission and were the results of tips from prospective tenants and the Commission’s testing program. The landlords and brokerage firms charged with discriminatory practices include Parkchester South Condominiums (Bronx), River Park Residences (Bronx), Goldfarb Properties (Manhattan, Bronx, Queens), Martini Properties (Bronx), and ABECO Management (Brooklyn), which together control approximately 20,000 units citywide.

The Commission’s complaints charge the landlords and brokerage firms with “pattern or practice” discrimination for repeatedly refusing to accept prospective tenants’ government assistance housing vouchers, including Section 8 and Living in Communities (LINC) vouchers. The landlords and brokerage firms involved in these investigations have been notified of the alleged violations and the Commission continues its investigation.

The Commission, which revitalized its testing program in 2016, has conducted more than 300 tests to root out source of income discrimination across the city and expects to file more cases against large landlords and brokers in the months ahead.

“New York City does not tolerate any type of housing discrimination, plain and simple,” said **Mayor de Blasio**. “No landlord should get away with turning away tenants because they use government assistance to pay rent, which is why we have significantly increased enforcement efforts to fight this form of discrimination and are working to ensure that everyone using housing vouchers can find and retain safe and affordable housing. These investigations are just a few of

many that the Commission is investigating to root out bad acting landlords and hold them accountable.”

“Make no mistake, the Commission is cracking down on source of income housing discrimination,” said **Commissioner and Chair of the NYC Commission on Human Rights Carmelyn P. Malalis**. “The Commission is aggressively going after larger landlords and brokers who deprive vulnerable New Yorkers of safe and affordable housing. We have significantly increased testing in this area, a powerful tool in identifying violations, and are heavily investing in prevention by educating landlords, brokers, and housing providers and their employees about the law. No New Yorker should be turned away from housing because of how they pay their rent and the Commission will continue its increased enforcement so that every New Yorkers with a voucher can find a safe place for themselves and their families to live.”

It has been illegal in New York City to discriminate against tenants based on lawful source of income since 2008, when then council member Bill de Blasio sponsored a bill to make it a violation of the NYC Human Rights Law, one of the strongest city anti-discrimination laws in the nation. Lawful source of income includes any federal, state, or local public or housing assistance towards the payment of rent, including Section 8, Living in Communities (LINC), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), HIV/AIDS Services Administration (HASA), Family Eviction Prevention Subsidy (FEPS), Special Exit and Prevention Supplement (SEPS), and Advantage program vouchers, among others. It is also unlawful for landlords and housing agents to publish any type advertisements, including online or print, that indicate a refusal to accept these programs.

In the course of its investigations, the Commission found that these large landlords and brokers repeatedly denied apartments to prospective tenants and testers citing that tenants “did not meet the necessary income requirements” to rent, despite having housing vouchers that covered the rent or flatly refused to accept housing vouchers at all, both clear violations of the law. For example, one prospective tenant was told the landlord “accepted everything except LINC vouchers,” while another was told the landlord doesn’t accept any housing assistance vouchers at all. One tester was denied an apartment after asking whether the landlord accepted Section 8 vouchers. An agent told her “no, we do not” accept vouchers and “that was the first thing you were supposed to tell me” before hanging up.

By filing a complaint on behalf of the City, the Commission is exercising its authority under the NYC Human Rights Law to launch its own “Commission-initiated investigations” into large landlords and brokers whom the Commission believes are systemically discriminating against prospective tenants, without requiring individual tenants themselves to file claims. The Commission may launch a Commission-initiated investigation after receiving anonymous tips or multiple complaints against the same landlord or broker, or as a result of testing that shows repeat violations resulting from a discriminatory policy, such as a “no voucher” policy.

The Commission also has the ability to fine landlords and brokers and award aggrieved tenants compensatory damages, including emotional distress damages, rent abatements, and other benefits and is the only city agency with the power to prosecute landlords and brokers for voucher discrimination. Last year, the Commission fined one landlord \$100,000 in civil penalties

for refusing to show a prospective tenant an apartment after he revealed he had a Section 8 voucher.

Because source of income housing discrimination impacts some of the City's most vulnerable communities, the NYC Commission on Human Rights, under Commissioner Carmelyn P. Malalis, has made combatting this form of discrimination one of its top priorities.

- In 2015, the Commission **quadrupled the number of investigations** into lawful source of income housing discrimination, filing 90 cases up from 22 in 2014, a 300% increase. Source of income housing discrimination investigations made up **one third of all housing discrimination cases in 2015**.
- In 2016 alone, the Commission filed the **highest number of lawful source of income discrimination investigations** in Commission history with **more than 120 cases filed**.
- The Commission is currently investigating more than **200 cases of lawful source of income discrimination** against landlords and brokers across the city.
- The Commission has **revitalized its testing program**, a powerful tool in rooting out discriminatory landlords and brokers, including matched pair testing which involves two individuals identical in every way except for having a housing voucher, who seek the same apartment from a landlord. The Commission:
  - **Hired new testing staff** to launch more than **300 lawful source of income discrimination tests** in 2016;
  - **Partnered with the Fair Housing Justice Center** to conduct additional source of income discrimination testing; and
  - **Partnered with the Mayor's Office for Data Analytics** to use data to target testing resources to have the most impact.
- The Commission **issued its highest civil penalty in a source of income discrimination case in Commission history in 2016**, fining a management company (Best Apartments Inc.) \$100,000 for refusing to show a prospective tenant an apartment after he revealed he had a Section 8 voucher.
- The Commission also **significantly increased its public outreach efforts** to inform New Yorkers about their housing rights under the law and prevent future acts of discrimination by training landlords on their obligations. In 2016, the Commission:
  - **Held nearly 200 Fair Housing Workshops** citywide to provide training to housing providers and community groups on the law;
  - **Engaged housing advocates and City agencies**, including the Fair Housing Justice Center, WIN-NY, Make the Road, New York Legal Assistance Group,

African Services Committee, Urban Justice Center, Legal Services, Human Resources Administration, Department of Homeless Services, Department of Housing Preservation and Development, and NYC Housing Authority to address housing discrimination among vulnerable communities and inform people of their rights; and

- **Launched a citywide multilingual print and social media ad campaign**, including installing posters across the city at grocery stores, laundromats, and nail and hair salons to educate New Yorkers on housing protections. This outreach effort reached millions and was done jointly with the Department of Housing Preservation and Development. So far, over 9,000 housing discrimination brochures created as part of this partnership have been distributed citywide.

If you or someone you know believes they are the victim of housing discrimination, call 311 and ask for NYC Commission on Human Rights or call the Commission's Infoline at 718-722-3131.

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“Discriminating against tenants based on their source of income is not only illegal, but immoral,” said **Public Advocate Letitia James**. “New York City will continue to crack down on bad actors who deny hardworking New Yorkers their right to a safe and decent home, and I am pleased that the NYC Commission on Human Rights is focusing on protecting tenants. Let this serve as a clear message to all landlords in New York City, discrimination of any kind will never be tolerated.”

“At its core, housing discrimination is antithetical to a just society,” said **Council Member Annabel Palma**. “Such a practice is even more egregious within a city in the midst of a housing crisis. Precluding potential tenants from being considered for apartments based on the source of their income is injurious and illegal. The economically distressed have enough on their plate without having their problems compounded by such violations.”

“I commend the NYC Commission on Human Rights for going after these bad-acting landlords and brokers,” said **Council Member Jumaane D. Williams**. “Thousands of New Yorkers are impacted by the City's housing crisis and are in search of quality, affordable housing. These landlords and brokerage firms systematically denied those opportunities to those in search for housing because they received government assistance. No New Yorker should be punished for using the resources provided to them by their government. I look forward to seeing the impact of the commission's work on this.”

“NYLAG applauds Commissioner Malalis and the NYC Commission on Human Rights for aggressively pursuing charges against landlords who are illegally refusing to accept housing vouchers as a source of income, denying tenants their rights and literally a roof over their heads,” said **Beth Goldman, President and Attorney-in-Charge of the New York Legal Assistance Group**. “Every day our housing attorneys work with low-income tenants who are victimized by unscrupulous landlords. Today's action and an overall increase in enforcement efforts demonstrate that New York City is committed to protecting the rights of its most vulnerable

residents and sends a clear message that discrimination against tenants based on source of income will not be tolerated.”

“No New Yorker should be turned away from housing because they receive government assistance to pay their rent,” said **Legal Services NYC Executive Director Raun Rasmussen**. “Landlords who illegally discriminate against tenants based solely on their source of income are exacerbating the affordable housing crisis and threatening the vibrancy and diversity of our communities. Legal Services NYC, which fights every day to help low-income New Yorkers secure and maintain safe and affordable housing, applauds the NYC Commission on Human Rights for making clear that these actions cannot and will not be tolerated in our City.”

“All New Yorkers should have a safe and affordable place to live, regardless of the source of their income,” said **Javier H. Valdés, Co-Executive Director of Make the Road New York**. “Housing discrimination based on source of income is a major problem in Latino and immigrant communities throughout New York City. Make the Road New York, which seeks justice for Latino and working class communities across the city, stands in solidarity with the Commission’s efforts to end this biased practice as soon as possible.”