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Baltimore Public Housing Families Applaud Settlement of Fair Housing Lawsuit at Hearing

11/20/12

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BALTIMORE – Today, the Court approved a historic settlement to resolve a long-running class action lawsuit at a hearing in the U.S. District Court of Maryland. Known as [Thompson v. HUD](#), this case sought to eradicate the legacy of nearly a century of government-sponsored racial segregation in the Baltimore Region. Several African-American families, including current and former residents of Baltimore public housing, spoke poignantly in favor of the settlement.

The key element of the settlement is an agreement to continue the successful and nationally recognized Baltimore Housing Mobility Program, which was launched nearly a decade ago in an earlier phase of the *Thompson* case. Through this voluntary program, families can choose to move to mixed-income neighborhoods throughout the Baltimore Region, with better access to employment and educational opportunities.

“Safe communities with good schools should be available to every American family, regardless of their race,” said [Joshua Civin](#), an attorney at the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc. (“LDF”), which represents the plaintiff families. “We are pleased that this settlement will continue the successful Baltimore Housing Mobility Program. Over the past decade, this voluntary program has opened pathways to a better future by giving low-income, African-American families the same choices about where to raise their children as everyone else in the region.”

Many families eligible to participate in the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program are already working as nursing assistants, school bus drivers, and in other jobs that are critical to the regional economy. The Baltimore Housing Mobility Program gives these families the assistance they need to enable them to live closer to their jobs. In their new neighborhoods, participants overwhelmingly report that they feel safer, healthier, and more confident in the future facing their children.

“I’m grateful that the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program will continue because it has changed my family’s life for the better,” said client Sabrina Oliver, who spoke at the hearing today in support of the settlement. Ms. Oliver lived in high-poverty areas of Baltimore City and Baltimore County before applying to the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program. Now, Ms. Oliver and her two children live in Anne Arundel County. “I signed up for the program because I needed to see a pathway out of poverty. Now, my daughter’s terrible asthma is non-existent and my son made the honor roll for the first time. While working part time, I’m taking classes at Anne Arundel Community College and creating a better future for

us.”

“This is a wonderful program. It gave me a chance to start a new and better life,” said client Michelle Green, another participant in the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program who spoke at the hearing today. “It’s not just about housing. They try to help low-income people branch out and do their best.” Ms. Green moved to Columbia, Maryland in search of better schools and a better environment for her four boys. The two oldest have since graduated from high school in Howard County, Maryland, while the two younger boys are doing well in Catonsville High School in Baltimore County, where the family now lives.

Ms. Green and Ms. Oliver are among dozens of members of the plaintiff class who submitted comments supporting approval of the settlement. Baltimore civic leaders also have voiced their support for the settlement in declarations accompanying the plaintiffs’ [filing in support of the settlement](#) last week. In addition, the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program has been incorporated into coordinated planning efforts currently underway in the region.

Background on *Thompson v. HUD*

The *Thompson* case was originally filed in 1995. A year later, Federal District Court Judge Marvin J. Garbis approved a partial settlement among the parties that called for new housing opportunities for public housing families after several Baltimore City high-rise projects were demolished. These housing opportunities included the pilot initiative that ultimately became the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program.

After nearly ten years of litigation, Judge Garbis gave public housing residents a precedent-setting civil rights victory in 2005. He ruled that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”) violated the Fair Housing Act by unfairly concentrating African-American public housing residents in the most impoverished, segregated areas of Baltimore City. Judge Garbis held that HUD must take a regional approach to promoting fair housing opportunities throughout the Baltimore Region.

After issuing his 2005 liability ruling, Judge Garbis directed further proceedings to determine whether HUD’s conduct also violated the U.S. Constitution’s guarantee of equal protection of the laws and to decide on an appropriate remedy for the plaintiff class. After extensive settlement negotiations, LDF and its co-counsel, including the ACLU of Maryland, on behalf of the plaintiff class of public housing families, together with HUD, Baltimore City, and the Housing Authority of Baltimore City, jointly filed this proposed settlement on August 24, 2012 to resolve all claims in the case. Today, Judge Garbis approved the settlement after finding it to be fair, reasonable, and adequate.

Key Features of the Settlement

The settlement, approved by the Court, includes a number of initiatives that HUD will undertake:

- **Regional Housing Opportunities.** HUD will continue the successful Baltimore Housing Mobility Program launched in an earlier phase of this case. Over the past decade, this program — which is currently administered by Metropolitan Baltimore Quadel, a nationally respected company — has assisted more than 1,800 families who have voluntarily chosen to move from public housing and other areas of deep poverty in Baltimore City to neighborhoods throughout Baltimore City and the surrounding region that are in low in poverty and offer better educational and economic opportunities. Each family that chooses to participate receives a Housing Choice Voucher, high-quality housing and credit counseling, and support with the transition to the new neighborhood and schools. (For more details, see [New Homes, New Neighborhoods, New Schools: A Progress Report on the Baltimore Housing Mobility](#).) The settlement will provide similar opportunities for up to 400 additional families each year, through 2018.
- **Incentives for Affordable Housing Development.** HUD will seek to provide incentives for private housing developers to include affordable units for families when federally-insured, market-rate developments are built in communities of opportunity throughout the Baltimore Region.

- **On-line Housing Locator.** HUD will develop an online listing to help families locate affordable housing opportunities throughout the Baltimore Region.
- **Regional Opportunity Study.** HUD will sponsor a study to analyze housing opportunity throughout the Baltimore Region.
- **Civil Rights Reviews.** HUD will conduct civil rights reviews of particular plans and proposals submitted to HUD for approval, involving federally funded housing and community development programs in the Baltimore Region. In these reviews, HUD will pay particular attention to the impact of the plans and proposals, individually and collectively, on the creation of meaningful housing choices for all families in strong, healthy, and inclusive communities across the Baltimore Region.

In addition, the settlement provides for completion of the remaining housing opportunities required by the 1996 *Thompson* partial consent decree and related court orders. Most have been completed, but a few projects are still in progress.

The settlement is consistent with federal policies to encourage fair housing choice and eliminate barriers to mobility and economic opportunity. In a June 2012 [speech on housing mobility](#), HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan stated: “[W]hen you don’t have mobility, you don’t have access to opportunity. That’s because when you choose a home, you choose so much more than a home. You also choose access to jobs, to schools for your children, to public safety. You choose a community – and the choices available in that community.” Donovan further stressed that HUD is “committed to mobility efforts” like the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program, which will be continued by this settlement, because “it represents . . . justice for families who were wronged.”
