



Long Island Housing Services, Inc.

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **National Fair Housing Alliance Files Sales Discrimination Complaint Against Long Island Real Estate Company**

LAWRENCE, NY – June 21, 2006 – The National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA) disclosed today the details of its undercover investigation of a Long Island real estate company which revealed a striking pattern of discrimination in the sale of homes. Julia Stevens Realty is the subject of NFHA’s administrative complaint filed today with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Real estate sales testing in Nassau County uncovered blatant steering of African-Americans posing as homebuyers, as well as anti-Semitic and other derogatory comments by real estate agents.

Real estate agents steered White testers posing as homebuyers away from neighborhoods and school districts with higher concentrations of African-Americans and Latinos. At the same time, agents marketed homes and schools to African-American homebuyers in the very areas that Whites were told to avoid. Real estate agents made negative comments about Jews to both White and African-American homebuyers. Agents repeatedly discouraged non-Jewish White homebuyers from considering neighborhoods with significant Jewish populations.

“It is shameful that the agents of Julia Stevens Realty so flagrantly violated local and federal fair housing laws with their comments and actions,” said Shanna L. Smith, NFHA’s President and CEO. “These are the types of behaviors and attitudes that perpetuate stereotypes and serve to keep our nation segregated and divided.” The current name of the company is a holdover from the previous owner.

In one example of anti-Semitic comments, an agent drove a White tester past her own home. She pointed to a picture of Jesus that a relative had placed in the window to “show those Jews.” The same agent later said that it was good to have some Jews in a neighborhood because they have a lot of money and they would never sell their homes to Blacks, thereby keeping the property values up.

“In my 30 years of working to fight discrimination on Long Island, this is certainly one of the most blatant cases of anti-Semitism I have ever encountered,” said Michelle Santantonio, Executive Director

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of Long Island Housing Services, Inc. (LIHS). “Sadly, racial steering is also rampant here, as reflected in the results of our rental testing. We as residents only need look around to see the damage it has done to our neighborhoods.” LIHS, the private non-profit fair housing agency serving Nassau and Suffolk, also announced today the results of extensive rental testing against Julia Stevens Realty. The agency will be filing a complaint with HUD based on those results.

As our communities become segregated, so do our schools. The Harvard Civil Rights Project has found that, as schools become increasingly segregated, children are denied the educational and social opportunities that come from interacting with a diverse community of people. The practice of steering creates demand for schools in certain school districts and a lack of desire for others. When this happens, the property values in the “less desirable” school districts become depressed, which further harms the public schools as their funding is based upon property taxes.

“By denigrating school districts based on their racial composition, these agents not only deprive the school districts of an expanded tax base but children the opportunity of growing up with their peers who are different racially, ethnically and religiously,” said Smith. “Every resident of these towns is being harmed by this illegal steering and discrimination.”

The National Association of Realtors provides a high level of fair housing training to its professionals, and most states require real estate agents to have continuing fair housing education in order to keep their licenses; but in spite of these training opportunities, too many agents continue to discriminate. Evidence of their willful violation is clear from NFHA’s testing – many licensed real estate professionals throughout the country have stated to testers that they know it is illegal to steer based on race or school districts, but have gone on to violate the law.

Over the past two years, NFHA has conducted extensive testing in twelve metropolitan areas nationwide, which has revealed a surprisingly high level of steering and other illegal behavior. Since mid-2005, NFHA has filed complaints against real estate companies located in metropolitan Atlanta, GA (Coldwell Banker “The Condo Store,” Coldwell Banker Marietta, and Re/Max Buckhead); Detroit, MI (Detroit Century 21 Town & Country), Chicago, IL (Re/Max East-West) and most recently in Westchester, NY (Peter J. Riolo Real Estate).

Licensed real estate professionals are fully aware that racial steering is against the law. HUD’s regulations implementing the federal Fair Housing Act state that:

*It shall be unlawful, because of race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, or national origin, to restrict or attempt to restrict the choices of a person by word or conduct in connection with seeking, negotiating for, buying or renting a dwelling so as to perpetuate, or tend to perpetuate, segregated housing patterns, or to discourage or obstruct choices in a community, neighborhood or development. [24 CFR Part 14, Section 100.70(a)]*

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**About the National Fair Housing Alliance ([www.nationalfairhousing.org](http://www.nationalfairhousing.org))**

Founded in 1988, the National Fair Housing Alliance is a consortium of more than 220 private, non-profit fair housing organizations, state and local civil rights agencies, and individuals from throughout the United States. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., NFHA, through comprehensive education, advocacy and enforcement programs, provides equal access to apartments, houses, mortgage loans and insurance policies for all residents of the nation.