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Race Discrimination Lawsuit Filed Against Long Island German-American Settlement League

Yaphank, New York — October 19, 2015—Today, Emery Celli Brinckerhoff & Abady, LLP filed a lawsuit in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York on behalf of Long Island Housing Services, Inc. (“LIHS”) and the Kneer family. The Kneers are owners of a home located in the former Camp Siegfried located in Yaphank, NY, which is owned by the German-American Settlement League (“GASL”). According to its by-laws, one of the primary purposes of the GASL is to “introduce, cultivate, and propagate in every direction true Germanic culture and to cultivate the German language, customs and ideals.” The GASL purchased the property from the American Bund party in the late 1930’s, when it was in use as a camp and gathering place for German-Americans who supported Nazism. Membership was originally limited to American citizens of “Aryan Blood.”

The former camp is now a residential community with by-laws that effectively prohibit anyone who is not white and of German descent from becoming a homeowner. LIHS’s complaint alleges that the GASL’s restrictions on membership, leasing, and resale of homes serve as a barrier to prospective home buyers who are not white people of German ancestry or background. The complaint alleges that these restrictions discriminate on the basis of race and national origin in violation of federal, state, and local fair housing laws.

LIHS first became aware of the GASL’s policies after being contacted by Philip Kneer and Patricia Flynn-Kneer, owners of a home in Siegfried Park. Prior to contacting LIHS, the Kneer family had been attempting to sell their home for approximately six years, but had been unable to do so as a result of the restrictive membership and advertising policies regarding the sale of homes. The Kneers sought assistance from LIHS to change the GASL’s rules to allow them to sell their home in an open and fair manner.

The Complaint seeks to enjoin the GASL from discriminating on the basis of race or national origin and includes claims under Section 1982 of the Civil Rights Act of 1866, the federal Fair Housing Act, the New York State Human Rights Law, and the Suffolk County Human Rights Law.

LIHS Executive Director Michelle Santantonio stated, “While Long Islanders have long been aware of the region’s regrettable history of residential segregation, this lawsuit serves to highlight a particularly shameful, and mostly forgotten, period in Long Island’s past.” Santantonio added, “The ugliness of intolerance and hate that once congregated there has departed, but in their place are its vestiges: discriminatory barriers to entry that contribute to Long Island’s continuing racial inequality. We are committed to eliminating racial segregation and barriers to Fair Housing choice wherever they exist on Long Island.”

Plaintiffs are represented by Diane L. Houk and Andrew Wilson of the law firm Emery Celli Brinckerhoff & Abady LLP (“ECBA”). Click [here](#) to view the complaint.

“The GASL’s long-standing effort to preserve an outdated exclusionary way of life based on racially restrictive by-laws is a vivid reminder of the continuing need for fair housing laws.” said ECBA attorney Diane L. Houk. “This lawsuit is intended to bring long overdue change to Yaphank so that buying a home is not dependent on race or ancestry. “

The federal Fair Housing Act, the New York State Human Rights Law, and the local Suffolk County Human Rights Law all prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, disability, sex, and familial status; New York State also prohibits discrimination on the basis of marital status, military status, and age; and Suffolk County prohibits discrimination against victims of domestic violence and based on source of income and veteran status.

Founded in 1969, Long Island Housing Services (www.LIFairHousing.org) is the private, non-profit, HUD-qualified Fair Housing Enforcement Organization serving Nassau and Suffolk counties and is a federally certified, approved Housing Counseling agency. LIHS’s mission is the elimination of unlawful discrimination and promotion of decent and affordable housing through advocacy and education.

EMERY CELLI BRINCKERHOFF & ABADY LLP is a litigation boutique that focuses on civil rights, commercial, criminal, and ethics matters. The firm represents individuals, businesses, and institutions in all aspects of litigation and pre-litigation dispute resolution, from negotiation, mediation and arbitration, through hearings, trials, and appeals.