



Long Island Housing Services, Inc.

For Immediate Release

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Fair Housing Groups to New York City Landlords: You Won't Get Away with Refusing to Rent to African American Applicants

Civil Rights Groups and Justice Department Team Up in Race Discrimination Lawsuit

WASHINGTON, DC –April 21, 2010 – Nearly three years ago, the National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA) and its member organization Long Island Housing Services (LIHS) investigated two brothers from Queens, N.Y. for refusing to rent an apartment to African Americans. Earlier this week, a federal judge granted them the opportunity to hold the landlords, Emanuel and Vyacheslav Uvaydov, accountable by intervening in a federal lawsuit brought against the pair by the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Uvaydovs jointly rent out a two-bedroom apartment in Queens. In August 2007, a white real estate agent from Long Island notified NFHA of her belief that the Uvaydovs discriminate based on race. She had telephoned one of the Uvaydovs to inquire about renting an apartment for her daughter, who is white, and her daughter's African American roommate, both of whom were attending college nearby. Mr. Uvaydov asked the mother the race of her daughter and her daughter's roommate. When she answered, Mr. Uvaydov said that he did not rent to African Americans.

“She was appalled that anyone would ask the race of a renter right over the telephone,” said NFHA President and CEO Shanna L. Smith, who first spoke with the woman. “Because of her training as a real estate agent, she immediately knew this statement by Mr. Uvaydov violated the Fair Housing Act. She called us as a concerned mother and professional, knowing he would continue to discriminate if nobody took action.”

In response to the real estate agent's complaint, NFHA launched an undercover investigation. The organizations used white and African-American individuals, known as testers, posing as potential renters. The African-American testers were better qualified than their white counterparts based on income, employment, and other factors.

In the course of the investigation, Vyacheslav Uvaydov told one NFHA white tester that he could not rent to her because one of her prospective roommates was Black. Uvaydov allegedly said that he could not rent to “people of different colors” because the neighborhood was white. In follow-up telephone testing conducted by LIHS, Uvaydov told white testers calling over the phone that his apartment was available and encouraged them to rent, but told a Black tester that it was not available. During each phone call, Uvaydov asked if the caller was “Italian.”

“Rarely do we see housing discrimination that is so blatant,” said LIHS Executive Director Michelle Santantonio. “The Fair Housing Act protects the public from discrimination in the housing market whether it is obvious or disguised, and fair housing organizations possess the tools to identify discrimination and are prepared to eliminate it. This type of discrimination plagues our country, is economically damaging, and must not continue.”

Under the Fair Housing Act, it is illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, disability, or familial status.

Following their investigation, NFHA and LIHS filed a formal complaint with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which issued an official charge of discrimination in August 2009. The Justice Department filed a lawsuit in the Eastern District of New York alleging discrimination under the federal Fair Housing Act on September 23, 2009. NFHA and LIHS became parties to the lawsuit on April 19, 2010, following Judge Eric Vitaliano’s order granting their motion to intervene.

*Founded in 1988, the **National Fair Housing Alliance** (www.nationalfairhousing.org) 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, DC, the National Fair Housing Alliance, through comprehensive education, advocacy and enforcement programs, provides equal access to apartments, houses, mortgage loans and insurance policies for all residents of the nation.*

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