

## **Los Angeles Endorses Landmark Accessible Housing Settlement**

Yesterday The Los Angeles City Council agreed to settle litigation brought by DRLC and two other nonprofit disability and fair housing advocacy groups that had claimed the City's housing programs were inaccessible to people with disabilities. The agreement, which is the largest of its kind in the country, provides that, over the next 10 years, the City will ensure that at least 4,000 of its affordable housing units meet the highly accessible standards required by federal law, and will enforce policies to ensure that those units are inhabited by people who need the specific accessibility features provided. The City has committed to spend at least \$200 million during the life of the agreement.

Three plaintiff organizations-- Independent Living Center of Southern California (ILCSC), Fair Housing Council of San Fernando Valley (FHCSFV), and Communities Actively Living Independent and Free (CALIF) brought suit against the City and the now-dissolved Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) in federal court in January 2012 to improve accessibility of affordable housing for people who need accessibility features in their housing units, including people who use wheelchairs or have other mobility disabilities, people who are deaf or have hearing disabilities, and people who are blind or have vision disabilities. "When our clients can't find affordable, accessible housing, they end up homeless, or in nursing homes, or living in inaccessible apartments that isolate them from the community," said ILCSC Executive Director Norma Jean Vescovo. "Settlement of this case means we can bring people with disabilities out of the shadows and back into the community."

The federal court complaint alleges that the City and CRA violated the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and state law, which require that affordable housing programs—particularly those built with federal and state financial assistance—meet specific accessibility requirements. "Through our work with clients and in the community, we began to encounter units in 2007 that were absolutely unusable by people with serious disabilities, but the City and CRA took no action," said Sharon Kinlaw, Executive Director of FHCSFV. "While we wish we never had to pursue litigation, we are pleased that this settlement will begin to address the needs of people with disabilities throughout Los Angeles."

Over the ten years of the agreement, the three plaintiff organizations will assist people with disabilities to transition into the newly-accessible units. "Because we know personally about the struggles of our clients with disabilities, we are uniquely suited to support them as they move into fully accessible new units," said CALIF Executive Director Lillibeth Navarro. "The settlement provides ongoing funding for us to be involved in the critical work of translating a legal victory into real housing opportunities for our consumers."

Plaintiffs were represented by Disability Rights Legal Center, Disability Rights California, Relman, Dane & Colfax PLLC, and David Geffen Law Office. Speaking on behalf of his colleagues, Michael Allen, a partner at the Relman firm and lead counsel in the litigation, said: "We are pleased that the City has acknowledged the severe shortage of accessible units in its affordable housing program, and that it has taken such comprehensive steps to address the needs of people with disabilities going forward. This is the largest accessibility settlement ever reached involving affordable housing, and it will send a strong, positive message to cities all

over the country that their housing programs must be accessible.”

The case, brought in the United States District Court, is *Independent Living Center of Southern California (ILCSC), et al v. City of Los Angeles, et al.*, U.S. District Court, Central District of California, Case No. 2:12-cv-000551-FMO-PJW. Litigation against the CRA will continue.

## **INFORMATION ABOUT PLAINTIFFS**

### **Independent Living Center of Southern California ([www.ilcsc.org/](http://www.ilcsc.org/))**

ILCSC is dedicated to providing the services which will offer persons with disabilities, older adults, and veterans the opportunity to seek an individual path towards independence - while educating the community. A non-profit 501 (c) (3) consumer-based, non-residential agency providing a wide range of services to a growing population of people with all types of disabilities and of all ages, older adults, and veterans.

### **Fair Housing Council of San Fernando Valley ([www.fhcsfv.com](http://www.fhcsfv.com))**

Our mission is to eliminate housing discrimination and to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to live in housing they desire and can afford regardless of race, color, familial status, religion, sex, mental & physical disabilities (including AIDS & HIV), national origin, marital status, age, source of income, and sexual orientation. Fair housing laws protect the rights of all home seekers to equal opportunity in the sale, rental, financing, insuring, appraising and advertising of housing.

### **Communities Actively Living Independent and Free (<http://califilc.webs.com/>)**

The mission of CALIF is to achieve greater input, participation and control over policies and services especially those for people with disabilities, including those that exclude them; to address discrimination wherever it exists; to encourage the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in mainstream activities that enhance the positive image and experience of disability; to empower people with disabilities by encouraging ongoing education and a broad knowledge of the history and heritage of the Disability Movement; and to provide the Disability Community with systems change advocacy, housing advocacy and other core services.