
WilmerHale Receives Outstanding Achievement Award for Anti-Housing Discrimination Work

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WilmerHale was recently recognized with an outstanding achievement award by The Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs, for pro-bono work which led to a large apartment-rental company agreeing to take steps meant to lower the barrier to renting its apartments to would-be renters who get federal rental assistance.

The firm received the Wiley Branton Award at the committee's recent dinner for its role in a consent agreement achieved between its pro bono client, the Equal Rights Center (ERC), and The Lenkin Company Management/Residential Inc. (Lenkin). Both WilmerHale and the committee represented the ERC.

The agreement was negotiated by a WilmerHale team led by partner [Steven Cherry](#) and including Senior Associate [Ericka Aiken](#) as well as lawyers from the committee. The agreement resolved allegations that Lenkin violated the federal Fair Housing Act and the DC Human Rights Act by refusing to rent available units to recipients of Housing Choice Vouchers.

The federally funded vouchers are provided to low-income individuals who meet certain eligibility requirements for housing assistance. Voucher recipients typically pay rent that is a percentage of their income, with federal assistance picking up the rest.

In its complaint, the ERC said it obtained evidence of Lenkin's alleged discrimination against voucher holders through testing. Washington DC prohibits such discrimination. In many cities and suburbs around the nation, discrimination against voucher holders is rampant and contributes to the housing crisis facing many families and individuals unable to find affordable and safe places to live.

In DC, discrimination against voucher holders disproportionately affects African Americans, who make up the vast majority of voucher holders in the District.

As part of its agreement with the ERC, Lenkin agreed to take numerous steps to increase the chances of voucher recipients renting its apartments. Those steps include affirmatively marketing rental units to voucher holders by sharing vacancy information with service providers who work with voucher holders and training employees to serve as voucher liaisons.

“We are glad we had the opportunity to assist in this effort which led to a strong agreement that can serve a model not only for other rental companies in the nation’s capital but elsewhere,” Mr. Cherry said. “Also, we are extremely proud to be recognized by the committee for our part in this important work of helping to make real the spirit of the nation’s fair housing laws.”