



WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE
FOR CIVIL RIGHTS & URBAN AFFAIRS

For Immediate Release

**PERSIAN/IRANIAN-AMERICAN GROUP AND BLUE GIN NIGHTCLUB RESOLVE
DISCRIMINATION DISPUTE**

WASHINGTON, D.C., January 10, 2008 -- Shabeh Jomeh, a social-networking organization of Persian/Iranian-American professionals and Meenoo Chahbazi, one of its members, represented by the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs and the law firm of Kirkland & Ellis LLP, announced today that they have reached a settlement agreement with a Georgetown nightclub, Blue Gin, resolving allegations that the owner and operator of the Club discriminated against Persian/Iranian-Americans. The Club is owned by Best Wings, Inc. Company. The settlement will avoid litigation between the parties concerning the alleged discrimination by Blue Gin.

The dispute involves allegations that a representative of Blue Gin, a Club located in the Georgetown section of Washington D.C, allegedly told a Shabeh Jomeh representative that he was hired to bring in "a white crowd" and that the Shabeh Jomeh members would not "mix" with the white crowd.

For a number of years, Shabeh Jomeh had held various social events at Blue Gin for its members. In late 2006, Blue Gin hired a new event planner to "promote" business at Blue Gin. Among his responsibilities was to negotiate with Shabeh Jomeh over the terms and conditions under which it would be permitted to continue to hold its events at Blue Gin. In January, 2007, Ms. Meenoo Chahbazi, on behalf of Shabeh Jomeh, met with the planner to discuss the continuing use of the Club by the organization. Ms. Chahbazi alleged that at the meeting the club's representative told her that Blue Gin desired to cater to a "white crowd" since the Club is located in Georgetown—a predominantly white neighborhood. The Blue Gin agent further told Ms. Chahbazi that Shabeh Jomeh's members would not blend in with the predominantly white crowd that he and the Club hoped to attract. Finally, Ms. Chahbazi alleges that she was further advised that her organization would only be welcome if it was segregated on a separate floor of the club and that the Club demanded that the organization provide a guarantee payment of thousands of dollars for each event, a requirement that had never been made previously. Ms. Chahbazi refused to comply with these blatantly discriminatory demands and the organization moved its functions elsewhere.

According to Ms. Chahbazi, "The Blue Gin representative's blatant, racist conduct was shocking. An onus was placed on me to speak up and take action. I am a civil rights attorney, but I was too close to the matter to represent myself or Shabeh Jomeh. I am grateful to have had the support of the Washington Lawyers' Committee and Kirkland & Ellis's pro bono team."

The actions described above, if proven in court, would violate federal and local civil rights laws which allow individuals to freely and on an equal basis enjoy public accommodations such as nightclubs and restaurants regardless of their race, ethnicity, color, national origin and/or religion. Specifically, the conduct alleged in the lawsuit violates Sections 1981 and 1985 of the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and Section 2-1402 of the District of Columbia Human Rights Act.



WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE
FOR CIVIL RIGHTS & URBAN AFFAIRS

Isabelle Thabault, an attorney at the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs and one of the lawyers representing Shabeh Jomeh, said "The law makes clear that places of public accommodation including restaurants and places of entertainment must be open to all people without discrimination on the basis of race or national origin. If business owners expect to enjoy the benefits of running a business open to the public, they must also follow the legal responsibilities that come with that privilege. It is well past the time when the evils of discrimination should be a thing of the past."

In the summer of 2007, counsel for Shabeh Jomeh and Ms. Chahbazi brought these allegations to the attention of Blue Gin's owners in an effort to resolve the dispute without litigation. Those discussions have led to an agreement between the parties. In that agreement Greg Talcott, the president and owner of Best Wings, Inc. d/b/a Blue Gin, issued an apology to Shabeh Jomeh and Ms. Chahbazi. The apology, which will be posted on the Blue Gin web site, offers an apology for any discriminatory remarks that may have been made by a former independent promoter for the Blue Gin or any alleged failure to make its facilities available to Shabeh Jomeh on equal, non-discriminatory terms. The apology also states that if such statements were made, the company was not aware of them and these statements are inconsistent with the company's commitment to diversity. As stated by Mr. Talcott in the apology:

Blue gin has a policy against discrimination on the basis of race, origin, or ethnicity, and does not condone any discriminatory actions by its employees or agents. To the extent such statements were made, I and Blue Gin sincerely apologize.

Mr. Talcott's apology will be posted both on Blue Gin's website and at the Club. In addition under the terms of the settlement, Blue Gin has agreed to increase its diversity training program and apply that program to any promoter or independent event planner used by Blue Gin. As noted in Mr. Talcott's apology, the promoter involved is no longer employed by Blue Gin.

The Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs was established in 1968 to provide pro bono legal services to address issues of discrimination and entrenched poverty. Since its founding, the Committee has handled more than 5,000 cases on behalf of individuals and advocacy organizations in the areas of fair housing, equal employment, public accommodations, public education, asylum and refugee rights, and disability rights. For more information about the Committee, see www.washlaw.org. The Committee can be reached at 202.319.1000.

For more information contact:

Robert Bruskin, 202.319.1000, ext. 101
Senior Counsel, Washington Lawyers' Committee
For Civil Rights and Urban Affairs
Bob_bruskin@washlaw.org