



WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE
FOR CIVIL RIGHTS & URBAN AFFAIRS



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
November 2, 2005

Contact:
Isabelle Thabault 202.319.1000 ext. 106
Kristen M. White 202.887.4536
kwhite@akingump.com

HOMEOWNERS FILE CIVIL RIGHTS LAWSUIT IN RACIALLY MOTIVATED HUNTER'S BROOKE ARSON

(Washington, D.C.) – The Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs and the law firm of Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP announced the filing of a civil rights lawsuit on behalf of homeowners against five individuals and a security guard company in a case stemming from one of the largest residential arsons in Maryland's history. The lawsuit, filed on behalf of 32 African-American and other minority homeowners from the Hunter's Brooke development in Charles County, Maryland, alleges that the arsons were racially motivated.

On December 6, 2004, arsonists, including a security officer working at the new housing development, set fires and severely damaged or destroyed 26 newly constructed homes in a neighborhood known as Hunter's Brooke, located in Indian Head, Maryland. Almost all of the homes targeted by the arsonists were, or were about to be, occupied by African-American families. The lawsuit alleges that, in setting the fires, the arsonists intended to prevent African-American and other minority families from moving into the neighborhood.

Perry Rosen, a partner at Akin Gump, stated, "As the lawsuit makes clear, acts of violence and intimidation targeted at individuals because of their race cannot be tolerated in the United States, as they tear at the very fabric of our great nation."

Five individuals were indicted on federal arson and criminal conspiracy charges in connection with their roles in planning and setting the fires, which caused at least \$10 million in damage. Two of the five defendants pled guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit arson. Another defendant was found guilty by a jury of 35 felony counts of arson and one count of conspiracy to commit arson. The other two defendants are currently awaiting trial.

Isabelle M. Thabault, director of the Fair Housing Project at the Washington Lawyers' Committee, said, "The federal and state fair housing laws are intended to provide the opportunity for persons of all races to live in the community of their choice. The actions of these defendants are not only criminal, they strike at the heart of Plaintiffs' civil rights and the federal civil rights laws enacted to protect all Americans from race discrimination."

The lawsuit was filed today in federal court in the District of Maryland against the five individual defendants: Aaron Speed, a security officer; Jeremy Parody; Patrick Walsh; Michael Everhart; and Roy McCann; as well as Securities Services of America, LLC, and its successors-in-interest, ABM Industries, Inc. and SSA Security, Inc. (collectively SSA). SSA provided private security services at Hunter's Brooke at the time of the fires. According to the lawsuit, at least two security guards, Aaron Speed and William Fitzpatrick, who were employed by SSA to provide security services at Hunter's Brooke, were involved, directly or indirectly, in the planning of, preparation for and/or setting of the fires.

Isabelle M. Thabault said, "The very individuals charged with providing protective services to the Hunter's Brooke community instead became the instruments of destruction. These arsonists not only destroyed homes, but also attempted to destroy the peace and tranquility that all Americans should feel in their homes and in their communities. It has been nearly 40 years since the federal Fair Housing Act was passed; the time of racial hatred and racially motivated violence should be far behind us."

About the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs:

For more than 37 years, the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs has represented both individuals and groups seeking to vindicate their civil rights. It has handled over 5,000 civil rights cases in employment, housing, public accommodations and other areas. The Committee represents people with claims of discrimination based on race, gender, national origin, disability, age, religion and sexual orientation; assists immigrants and refugees; and works for education reform in the Washington, D.C., public schools. Leveraging its own broad expertise in discrimination litigation with the resources of Washington, D.C.'s private bar, the Committee has become nationally known for its landmark court victories, record judgments and precedent-setting consent decrees. Its capacity to mobilize the private bar has made it possible for the Committee to provide its clients more than 50,000 hours of quality legal representation every year.

About Akin Gump:

Founded in 1945, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP, a leading international law firm, numbers more than 900 lawyers with offices in Austin, Brussels, Dallas, Dubai, Houston, London, Los Angeles, Moscow, New York, Philadelphia, Riyadh (affiliate), San Antonio, San Francisco, Silicon Valley, Taipei and Washington. The firm has a diversified practice and represents regional, national and international clients in a wide range of areas, including antitrust; appellate; banking and finance; capital markets; communications and information technology; corporate and securities; corporate governance; employee benefits; energy; entertainment and media; environmental; estate planning, wealth transfer and probate; financial restructuring; global security; government contracts; health; insurance; intellectual property; international trade; investment funds; labor and employment; land use; litigation; mergers and acquisitions; private equity; privatization; project development and finance; public law and policy; real estate development and finance; Russia/CIS; tax; and technology. For additional information, please visit our Web site at akingump.com.

###