



WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS & URBAN AFFAIRS

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NATIONWIDE DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION LAWSUIT FILED AGAINST DEVELOPER ARCHSTONE-SMITH, ONE OF AMERICA'S LARGEST RESIDENTIAL APARTMENT DEVELOPERS

WASHINGTON, D.C. (December 20, 2004) The Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs announced today the filing of a lawsuit against one of the nation's largest residential apartment developers, the Archstone-Smith Trust (NYSE:ASN), alleging discrimination against persons with disabilities. The complaint, filed in federal court in Baltimore, Maryland today, charges Archstone and other defendants with continuous and systematic civil rights violations of people with disabilities in the design and construction of more than 100 apartment complexes in 18 states and the District of Columbia.

The suit is brought on behalf of the Equal Rights Center (ERC), the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) and the United Spinal Association on behalf of persons with disabilities. All three plaintiffs are represented by the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs and the Washington law firm of Cohen, Milstein, Hausfeld & Toll, PLLC.

This lawsuit is believed to be the largest legal action brought to enforce accessibility requirements for multi-family housing under the Fair Housing Act.

"Since 1991 the law has required developers to include basic features of accessibility in multi-family housing" said Isabelle M. Thabault, Director of the Fair Housing Project at the Washington Lawyers' Committee. "Thirteen years later Archstone continues to build apartment complexes that are difficult or impossible for persons who use wheelchairs to access. With this lawsuit we are saying it is past time for Archstone to make sure the units it builds are open to everyone, including persons with disabilities."

"The violations of law committed by Archstone could have been avoided, and were detected, by a simple tape measure. Archstone has perpetrated a cruel hoax by erecting dozens of apartment buildings over the past decade that have been advertised as open to the public but are inaccessible to people with disabilities," said Joseph M. Sellers, who heads the civil rights practice at Cohen, Milstein, Hausfeld & Toll P.L.L.C. in Washington, D.C. "Archstone might as well have posted signs saying, 'No people with disabilities wanted' at its apartment facilities."

"Archstone has built thousands of units since 1991 with steps, narrow doorways, and other barriers that effectively exclude persons with disabilities from living in those units" said Rabbi Bruce E. Kahn, Executive Director of the Equal Rights Center. "With this lawsuit we are sending the message that not one more unit should be built that excludes persons with disabilities from living there."

According to Andrew J. Imparato, President and CEO of AAPD, "Archstone's inaccessible buildings had an adverse impact on AAPD members in the geographic areas where Archstone does business. Accessible, affordable housing is very difficult for people with mobility-related disabilities to find in just about every major metropolitan area in this country, and when new buildings go up that aren't accessible, that just makes a bad situation worse."

James Weisman, general counsel for United Spinal Association says that his members have been adversely affected by Archstone's actions. "Anytime a housing facility is built which can not be accessed by someone using a wheelchair, they are damaged since the housing market remains limited to them. Moreover, they are unable to visit friends and relatives who live in such housing, because inaccessible buildings prevent people with disabilities from visiting friends and relatives that live in such housing."

If you have information about the allegations in this case, please call 1-866-302-1322. If you would like to learn more about the lawsuit, and for a copy of the complaint, please visit www.fairhousing.cmht.com or www.washlaw.org.