

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**MOBILE HOME RESIDENTS FILE HOUSING DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT  
AGAINST CITY OF RICHMOND**

**Families say the City's code enforcement campaign is discriminatory, aims to shut down source of affordable housing.**

**Richmond, Virginia, April 27, 2015** – A group of more than thirty current and former mobile home park residents filed a fair housing complaint against the City of Richmond on Friday after a year of trying to cooperate with the City. It was submitted to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”) over the City’s code enforcement campaign against mobile home parks. “We all want a safe home and we want to comply with the code,” says Gerardo Martinez, a resident of Mobile Towne on Old Midlothian Turnpike. “But we feel like the City is targeting mobile home parks because we are communities of poor, mostly Latino families.”

The group submitted the complaint to HUD with the help of the Legal Aid Justice Center in Richmond and the law firm of Crowell & Moring in Washington, D.C. It alleges that the City’s enforcement campaign discriminates by specifically targeting mobile home parks, where residents are mainly Latino. “Instead of finding ways to help ensure they have safe housing, inspectors are threatening to shut down the only option many of these families can afford,” according to Legal Aid Justice Center attorney Phil Storey.

The complaint describes ways the City has subjected mobile home residents to harsh enforcement actions. These include intrusive inspections with armed police escorts; threats to condemn homes or even bring criminal charges if residents don’t allow inspectors inside; and unreasonable repair standards that make compliance unrealistic. Hector Estrada’s home at Rudd’s Trailer Park, on Jefferson Davis Highway, was condemned last August. He still wonders what the City really wants. “I was making the repairs the inspectors required,” Mr. Estrada says. “I spent over \$2,000 getting permits and paying people to make repairs. Then the inspector condemned my home with no warning. He said if I didn’t stay out, he would call the police on me. Why?”

“Federal civil rights laws protect minorities and immigrants from policies that disproportionately threaten their access to housing,” says Crowell & Moring attorney Clifford Zatz. “That’s especially the case when the City could choose less disruptive ways to address safety concerns.” According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of Richmond is less than 7% Latino. The complaint estimates that over 70% of the residents in the City’s mobile home parks are Latino.

The filing describes multiple attempts since last summer by residents and area nonprofits to resolve the City's safety concerns without risking residents' access to housing. According to the complaint, the City has consistently rejected or withheld funding for these alternatives.

The filing also alleges that the City has never made any coordinated effort to address the risk of homelessness and other crises created by condemnations, despite planning the enforcement campaign for years. Last July, the Mayor's office admitted the need to provide assistance to residents, but the complaint describes the City's consistent refusal to follow through with help for the affected families.

The complaint asks HUD to seek a court order to halt the City's enforcement campaign against mobile home parks. The residents state that they want the City to pursue a collaborative, community-based approach to addressing safety issues, rather than one based on threats.

A copy of the complaint can be downloaded from [www.justice4all.org](http://www.justice4all.org).

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The Legal Aid Justice Center is a Virginia nonprofit that provides free legal assistance and representation for low-income individuals in Virginia who have the least access to legal resources. LAJC's staff of 45 lawyers and professionals work from offices in Richmond, Charlottesville, Falls Church, and Petersburg. See [www.justice4all.org](http://www.justice4all.org) for more information.

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