



LEGAL AID
JUSTICE CENTER

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**VIRGINIA TENANTS SUE LANDLORDS' DEBT COLLECTOR
OVER DECEPTIVE NOTICES AND HIGH FEES**

Charlottesville, Virginia, October 5, 2016 – Five tenants from Richmond, Charlottesville and Harrisonburg have filed a class-action lawsuit in the Charlottesville federal court against Senex Law, P.C., a debt collection firm hired by the plaintiffs' and many other Virginia landlords. The plaintiffs, represented *pro bono* by the Legal Aid Justice Center and the law firm of MichieHamlett, allege that Senex uses deceptive practices to collect alleged delinquent rent and other fees from tenants, in violation of the federal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act. Senex's practices harm tenants through costly additional charges and for some, lengthy eviction records. The five plaintiffs have brought the case on behalf of a statewide class of tenants who suffered at the hands of Senex's unlawful practices.

"Senex sells its system as an easy time-saver for landlords, but it's anything but easy for tenants," said Bryan Slaughter, MichieHamlett senior counsel. "Once they are behind on rent, the high extra fees charged by Senex make it difficult for our clients to ever get back on track."

The suit alleges that Senex violated the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act by sending notices purporting to come from landlords, but which were actually drafted and mailed by Senex. The notices do not contain federally-mandated language disclosing Senex's identity as a debt collector, or describing the procedure that recipients can use to challenge their accuracy. This business practice hurts tenants, costs them substantial money, and puts them at unnecessary and repeated risk of eviction.

Senex then quickly files eviction actions in bulk, generating more costs to tenants and relying on sometimes outdated or inaccurate information from landlords. "This practice goes beyond a simple technical violation of the law. It has real costs to our clients, financial and otherwise, because it can ruin their rental record and their chances to find other housing in the future," said Kim Rolla, Legal Aid Justice Center's lead attorney on the case

"It's been really hard for my family to keep up with all these extra charges," said Teri Crawford, a named plaintiff in the class-action suit. "I just want stability, to keep a roof over my kids' heads. I pay my rent. But it seems like every time we're even a little late, we get hit with a bunch of fees."

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About the Legal Aid Justice Center

The Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC) fights injustice in the lives of individual Virginians while rooting out exploitative policies and practices that keep people in poverty. LAJC uses impact litigation, community organizing, and policy advocacy to solve urgent problems in areas such as housing, education, civil rights, immigration, healthcare and consumer finance. LAJC's primary service areas are Charlottesville, Northern Virginia and Richmond/Petersburg, but the effects of their work are felt statewide.

About MichieHamlett

MichieHamlett is a Charlottesville law firm that has represented clients for more than 65 years in the courts of Virginia and the United States in commercial, domestic, and serious personal injury litigation. In addition to a strong litigation practice, the firm has represented and advised clients on matters ranging from trusts and estates to complex commercial transactions. MichieHamlett is committed to serving the community and donates a significant amount of time to pro bono activities that help make the system of justice accessible to all. www.michiehamlett.com

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