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## **SETTLEMENT OF DISCRIMINATION LAWSUIT AGAINST D.C. HOUSING AUTHORITY ENSURES EQUAL ACCESS FOR RESIDENTS WHO ARE DEAF OR HAVE HEARING IMPAIRMENTS**

WASHINGTON, DC (March 2, 2015)—Federal District Court Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly has issued an order approving the settlement of an important disability discrimination case brought against the D.C. Housing Authority (DCHA). Pursuant to the settlement, DCHA will revise its effective communications and reasonable accommodations policies to ensure that public housing and Voucher clients who are deaf or have hearing impairments get prompt access to sign language interpreters. In addition, DCHA will require all of its employees to undergo disability rights training, and will notify its clients of their right to an interpreter. The agreement also requires DCHA to pay \$350,000 in monetary relief.

The settlement resolves a lawsuit filed in May 2013 by Relman, Dane & Colfax and the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia on behalf of two individuals, Jacqueline Young and Latheda Wilson, and Deaf-REACH, a non-profit organization that serves clients with hearing disabilities. The litigation challenged DCHA's failure to provide sign language interpreters necessary for effective communication and equal access to people with hearing impairments. For years, Plaintiffs Young and Wilson, and the clients of Deaf-REACH were denied interpreters and access to basic services, in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act and related federal disability rights laws.

Key provisions of the new policy will require that DCHA:

- provide prominent notices informing individuals of interpretation services for those with hearing disabilities;
- work with individuals who have a hearing impairment to determine what auxiliary aids or services are appropriate, as well as the timing, duration, and frequency with which they will be provided;
- install video remote interpreting services to provide immediate access to sign language interpretation services in a variety of situations including its walk-in hours;
- train DCHA staff regarding the new policy;
- track requests for interpretation services to confirm compliance with the policy and determine need and supply; and
- establish grievance procedures that allow complaints to be directed to informal resolution or a formal adjudication process, as appropriate.

Megan Cacace, lead counsel for the Plaintiffs and an attorney with Relman, Dane & Colfax PLLC, said: "The policy changes achieved in this settlement will have sweeping impact far beyond the Plaintiffs in this case. DCHA serves over 30,000 residents. As a result of this lawsuit, and these Plaintiffs' willingness to stand up for their rights, residents who are deaf or

have hearing impairments will finally get the equal access and non-discriminatory treatment to which they are entitled.”

Julie Becker, Supervising Attorney at Legal Aid and co-counsel for Plaintiffs, said: “Through this settlement, we will have transformed the way DCHA interacts with people with hearing impairments. No one else should have to endure the discrimination Ms. Young and Ms. Wilson faced in being repeatedly denied interpreters over many years.”

The case is *Jacqueline Young, et al. v. District of Columbia Housing Authority*, Civil Action No. 1:13-cv-00652-CKK.

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### **About the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia**

The Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia was formed in 1932 to “provide legal aid and counsel to indigent persons in civil law matters and to encourage measures by which the law may better protect and serve their needs.” For more than 80 years, Legal Aid has been making justice real – in individual and systemic ways – for persons living in poverty in D.C. Since its founding, Legal Aid has served tens of thousands of the District’s neediest residents. Last year, more than 4,000 individuals came to Legal Aid for an initial interview during our open walk-in hours. Legal Aid currently serves individuals and families living in poverty in four priority areas – public benefits, consumer, family/domestic violence, and housing law. It also litigates appellate matters through its nationally-recognized Barbara McDowell Appellate Advocacy Project. To find out more about Legal Aid, please visit its website at <http://www.legalaiddc.org>.

### **About Relman, Dane & Colfax PLLC**

Relman, Dane & Colfax is one of the largest plaintiff-side fair housing law firms in the country. Based in Washington, D.C. with additional offices in Ohio and New Mexico, the Relman firm is responsible for significant legal decisions in civil rights cases, including those in *United States ex rel. Anti-Discrimination Center v. Westchester County* (housing desegregation), *Kennedy v. City of Zainesville* (access to public services), *Baltimore v. Wells Fargo* and *Memphis v. Wells Fargo* (discriminatory lending), and *National Fair Housing Alliance v. Spanos* (ensuring accessibility in housing design and construction). More information about the firm’s cases is available at [www.relmanlaw.com](http://www.relmanlaw.com).