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FAIR HOUSING GROUPS REACH SETTLEMENT EXPANDING HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

INDIANAPOLIS, IN – Today, the Fair Housing Center of Central Indiana (FHCCI), the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan (FHCWM), the Fair Housing Project of Legal Aid of North Carolina, and the Lexington Fair Housing Council announce a conciliation agreement with Pierce Education Properties to expand fair housing opportunities for families with children. Pierce Education Properties manages a portfolio of 27 student housing complexes, encompassing approximately 5,715 individual units across 18 states. The agreement will open up access for families with children to over 12,830 rentable bedroom units.

“We commend Pierce Education Properties and plan to hold them as a model for other student housing portfolios in how they worked to quickly address the issues in the filed complaint and fully open their housing to students with children,” stated Amy Nelson, Executive Director of the FHCCI. “Those with children face housing barriers far too often and sometimes must make challenging choices in finding safe and affordable housing while building toward their futures.”

“This agreement recognizes that today’s college student population is made up of people from all age groups and backgrounds. Over one-third of students attending post-secondary institutions last fall were over the age of 24. Some have spouses and children and others are single parents attending college

either full-time or part time,” said FHCWM Executive Director, Nancy Haynes. “Student housing management companies need to be mindful that their policies and practices do not exclude or place an unfair rent burden on students with children. Student housing should provide equal housing opportunity for all students.”

The agreement is the resolution of a fair housing complaint filed with the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) in December 2019 alleging violations of fair housing laws against families with children. The 2019 complaint alleged an ongoing pattern of discrimination through the Respondents’ enforcement of a one person per bedroom policy regardless of the size of the bedroom, local occupancy code, or HUD issued guidance. The fair housing groups conducted a joint investigation across several states regarding the Respondents’ policies and how they were marketed and maintained. The investigation found that a single student with a child as young as one year old would be required to rent an extra bedroom instead of sharing with his/her child. The investigation also uncovered that a married student couple with a child could not rent a two bedroom unit under the Respondents’ then policies.

HUD did not make a determination as to the validity of the allegations, and Pierce Education Properties denied the allegations and admitted no wrongdoing, but agreed to settle the claims by entering into a Conciliation Agreement with HUD and the private fair housing groups. In order to settle the complaint, Pierce Education Properties agreed to pay \$50,000; change their occupancy policy to provide equal housing opportunity to families with children; revise their marketing materials to be inclusive of all students regardless of familial status, age, disability, and other protected classes under fair housing law; and train their employees and managers across the nation on fair housing, among other terms to ensure compliance with fair housing laws.

Finding a decent, affordable place to live can be extremely challenging for students. Those with children face added barriers in locating housing near campuses that will rent to them with their child or children. A [recent report](#) by the National Fair Housing Alliance found that 11.15% of the filed complaints with HUD involved discrimination against families with children. Another [study](#) found that 14% of community college students are homeless.

Jeff Dillman, Co-Director of the Fair Housing Project of Legal Aid of North Carolina, stated, “Throughout the country, families with children face great difficulty finding safe, affordable housing. Overly-restrictive occupancy policies can unlawfully deny them housing they are otherwise qualified for, and the current pandemic has only exacerbated the problem. We hope that Pierce Educational Properties’ new policies will serve as a model for other housing providers to ensure that they provide families with children an equal opportunity to housing.”

“There is an affordable housing crisis throughout the nation. Families with children often have limited options that they can afford, and they often feel excluded from apartments that house college students. This settlement will help change some of those misperceptions,” stated Arthur Crosby, Executive Director, of the Lexington Fair Housing Council.

The fair housing groups were represented in this enforcement action by Relman Colfax PLLC attorneys Jia Cobb and Kali Schellenberg, and paralegal Charlotte Saltzman. A copy of the conciliation agreement can be found on the [FHCCI’s News Page](#).

The Fair Housing Center of Central Indiana (FHCCI) is a private, nonprofit fair housing organization founded in 2011 and based in Indianapolis, Indiana. Its mission is to ensure equal housing opportunities by eliminating housing discrimination through advocacy, enforcement, education, and outreach. More information on the FHCCI at: www.fhcci.org

The Fair Housing Center of West Michigan is a private, non-profit fair housing organization committed to providing comprehensive fair housing services, including education, outreach, research, advocacy and enforcement. The Fair Housing Center is the front door to housing choice, ensuring that everyone in our community has equal opportunity to choose housing that's right for them. You can learn more about the FHCWM at: www.fhcwm.org

The Fair Housing Project of Legal Aid of North Carolina works to eliminate housing discrimination and to ensure equal housing opportunity for all people in North Carolina through education, outreach, public policy initiatives, advocacy and enforcement. Learn more about the Fair Housing Project at www.fairhousingnc.org

The Lexington Fair Housing Council is a full-service, nonprofit civil rights agency committed to eradicating discrimination in housing. The Fair Housing Council enforces the federal Fair Housing Act, the Kentucky Fair Housing Act, and the local fair housing ordinances (where applicable). The Lexington Fair Housing Council is the only private nonprofit fair housing agency in Kentucky and investigates complaints throughout the Commonwealth. More information at: lexingtonfairhousing.com

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