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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Rental Housing Provider to Pay \$450,000 for National Origin, Race, and Familial Status Discrimination at Bucks County Apartment Complex**

**Fort Washington, PA** -The Housing Equality Center of Pennsylvania (HECP) and a Bucks County couple have entered into an agreement resolving allegations that CM Bucks Landing 120, LLC, Residential Management (NY), Inc., and Aspen Grove Apartment Homes violated the Fair Housing Act by adopting and applying policies that discriminated against potential applicants based on national origin, race, and familial status.

In May of 2019, HECP was contacted when a family had their application for tenancy rejected by Aspen Grove Apartment Homes due to the complex's policy of requiring that all adults have a social security number. The husband had a social security number, an outstanding credit score, and an income which qualified the family to rent the apartment. His wife had lawfully arrived from Colombia and was lawfully residing in the United States, but was not yet a citizen and did not yet have a social security number.

The Housing Equality Center conducted an investigation and discovered that Residential Management's policies and practices at Aspen Grove and their other rental complexes were discriminatory on several bases.

Residential Management's requirement of a social security number for all adult applicants has an unlawful discriminatory impact based on national origin and race, in that it is effectively a policy that excludes people who have lawfully immigrated to the U.S. from another country but have not yet received a social security number.

In addition, Residential Management's policies and procedures included a blanket ban on rentals to persons who have any type of criminal background

which has an unlawful discriminatory impact based on race and national origin. This policy did not contain a process for an individualized assessment to determine whether or not an applicant posed a direct threat to other persons or property, or any other less discriminatory alternative.

Finally, Residential Management's policies and procedures contained occupancy standards at some complexes which had an unlawful and discriminatory impact on families with children. The Aspen Grove policy limited occupancy of a two bedroom apartment to three people and occupancy of a three bedroom apartment by four people. These stringent limitations were not justified by local property maintenance codes and limited the housing opportunities available to families in violation of the Fair Housing Act.

Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, known as the Fair Housing Act, makes it unlawful to discriminate in connection with any housing related transaction, based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, or familial status. In addition to engaging in differential treatment based on any of the protected classes, housing providers are prohibited from implementing facially neutral policies or practices that have a disproportionate impact on members of one or more of the protected classes in comparison to the general population.

"Property managers need to understand that even policies which are applied neutrally to all applicants may violate the Fair Housing Act if they make it more likely that immigrants, people of color, or families with children will be excluded from residing in a community," said Rachel Wentworth, Executive Director of HECP. "Housing professionals have an essential responsibility to ensure equal opportunity and freedom from discrimination in all of their practices, even if that discrimination is not explicit or intentional."

CM Bucks Landing 120, LLC and Residential Management denied the allegations in this case but signed an agreement that will result in payments totaling \$450,000 in damages to the complainants, to HECP to cover a portion of the costs incurred to bring about the agreement and to provide future consumer education regarding the fair housing rights of southeastern Pennsylvania residents, and legal fees. The respondents also agreed to adopt revised policies addressing the acceptance of alternative forms of documentation for applicants without social security numbers, a less discriminatory criminal background screening process, and less restrictive, more appropriate occupancy standards.

The Housing Equality Center of Pennsylvania has worked since 1956 to eliminate housing discrimination through education, advocacy, and enforcement of fair housing laws. HECP's work serves a population of over 4.65 million in the seven-county Philadelphia and Lehigh Valley regions. As the nation's oldest fair housing agency, HECP's successes include eradicating discriminatory practices at over 50,000 units of housing. HECP's investigations are funded in part by the Fair Housing Initiatives Program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development. HECP and the individual complainants were represented in this matter by Relman Colfax.

Anyone suspecting that they were denied housing for discriminatory reasons, or any housing provider who wants information on how they can operate their business in compliance with the Fair Housing Act should contact HECP at 267-419-8918 or visit [www.equalhousing.org](http://www.equalhousing.org).