



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contacts:

Morgan Williams
National Fair Housing Alliance
202-898-1661
mwilliams@nationalfairhousing.org

Jes Scheinpflug
Open Communities
847-501-5760 ext. 502
jes@open-communities.org

Anne Houghtaling
HOPE Fair Housing Center
630-690-6500 ext. 114
anne.houghtaling@hopefair.org

Fair Housing Organizations and Ryan Companies Reach Agreement to Make Housing Complexes Accessible for People with Disabilities

Veterans and Seniors Benefit from \$2.7 Million Settlement

Winnetka, IL, November 10, 2015 – The National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA), Open Communities, and HOPE Fair Housing Center (HOPE) have reached an agreement with Ryan Companies US, Inc. to make Ryan properties compliant with the accessibility requirements of the federal Fair Housing Act. Ryan Companies has agreed to make alterations to over 900 apartments, resolving a lawsuit involving 10 housing complexes located in Illinois and Iowa, over the next 24 months so the apartments and all common areas will be accessible for people with disabilities.

The agreement settles claims that Ryan Companies discriminated against people with disabilities by designing and/or constructing buildings without [the required accessibility features](#). The renovations will make bathrooms and kitchens useable for wheelchair users. Electrical outlets and thermostats will be moved to be within reach, and thresholds will be lowered or removed so wheelchair users have access. Outside the buildings, routes with excessive slopes will have handrails added as safety measures for seniors and wheelchair users navigating the complex. The cost of making these changes is estimated at \$2.7 million.

In addition to making these modifications, Ryan Companies will pay a total of \$875,000 to NFHA, Open Communities, and HOPE for damages, attorneys' fees and costs, and frustration of the core mission of the fair housing agencies. Two additional properties at issue in the lawsuit, Glendale Heights and Zurich Meadows, settled separately for \$85,000 and \$25,000 respectively.

"Veterans with disabilities face barriers daily as they move about their communities. Builders, developers and architects need to be cognizant of the legal and moral requirements for designing and constructing housing in America. The search for accessible, affordable housing is already a challenge, and this settlement makes this search for housing successful," said Anne Houghtaling, Executive Director of HOPE Fair Housing Center.

“It has been the law of the land since 1991 that all new apartment buildings be designed and built so people with disabilities can travel around the property and maneuver through their apartment easily. It is so important to enforce the accessibility requirements of the Fair Housing Act and to do so across state lines, particularly in places where no private, non-profit fair housing center exists, such as Iowa. This joint investigation resulted in providing equal housing opportunities beyond the geographic service areas of HOPE and Open Communities. We are pleased that Ryan Companies will make the changes necessary to ensure barrier-free access in the apartments and around the complexes, especially for people using wheelchairs,” said Shanna L. Smith, President and CEO of the National Fair Housing Alliance.

Neda Nozari Brisport, Director of Fair Housing at Open Communities stated, “Our goal is to create fully inclusive communities. People with disabilities encounter many barriers that thwart inclusion, not least of which is the ability to find affordable, accessible housing. I am confident that this victory will send the message to developers to be mindful of the federal accessibility requirements in advance of building, and will set a standard in the housing industry that models accessibility to all.”

The Fair Housing Act makes it illegal to discriminate based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability and familial status. Since 1991, builders, developers, architects and others have been mandated to comply with the Act’s requirements for accessible design and construction.

The National Fair Housing Alliance, Open Communities, and HOPE Fair Housing Center are represented by Soule, Bradtke & Lambert (Illinois) and Mehri & Skalet, PLLC (Washington, DC).

The consent decree in this matter is available [here](#).

####

About the National Fair Housing Alliance (www.nationalfairhousing.org)

Founded in 1988, the National Fair Housing Alliance is a consortium of more than 220 private non-profit fair housing organizations, state and local civil rights groups, and individuals from 37 states and the District of Columbia. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., NFHA, through comprehensive education, advocacy and enforcement programs, provides equal access to apartments, houses, mortgage loans and insurance policies for millions of people.

About Open Communities (www.open-communities.org)

Open Communities, formerly Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs, is a nonprofit organization that advocates for fair and affordable housing in 16 northern suburbs of Chicago. We educate, advocate and organize to promote just and inclusive communities in north suburban Chicago.

About HOPE Fair Housing Center (www.hopefair.org)

Established in 1968, HOPE is the oldest fair housing center in Illinois. HOPE seeks to create equal housing opportunities regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, familial status, or any other characteristics protected under state or local laws. Located in West Chicago, HOPE serves 30 counties in northern and north central Illinois.

The work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by funding under a grant with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The substance and findings of the work are dedicated to the public. The author and publisher are solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in this publication. Such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Federal Government.