



# Department of Justice

**Mark J. Lesko**  
**Acting United States Attorney**  
**Eastern District of New York**

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CONTACT: JOHN MARZULLI

(718) 254-6323

## **UNITED STATES SETTLES HOUSING DISCRIMINATION LAWSUIT AGAINST STATEN ISLAND RENTAL AGENT AND REAL ESTATE AGENCY**

BROOKLYN – Mark J. Lesko, Acting United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, and Pamela S. Karlan, Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division, announced today a settlement with Village Realty of Staten Island Ltd. and Denis Donovan, a sales and former rental agent at Village Realty, to resolve a lawsuit filed last year alleging discrimination against African Americans in violation of the Fair Housing Act.

The settlement resolves claims that Donovan discriminated against prospective renters on the basis of race by treating African Americans who inquired about available rental units less favorably than similarly-situated white persons, and that Village Realty is legally responsible for Donovan’s alleged discrimination because he was acting as Village Realty’s agent. The lawsuit was based on the results of testing conducted by the department’s Fair Housing Testing Program, in which individuals pose as renters to gather information about possible discriminatory practices. According to the complaint, Donovan allegedly told African-American testers about fewer rental units than white testers, offered white testers rental discounts and opportunities to inspect units that were not offered to African-American testers, generally offered African-American testers units only in racially mixed neighborhoods while offering white testers units in both overwhelmingly white and racially mixed neighborhoods, and made more encouraging comments to white testers about available rental units.

“Today’s settlement underscores the importance of making housing equally available to all residents of this district, regardless of race,” stated Acting U.S. Attorney Lesko. “This Office is committed to ending racial discrimination and to achieving fairness and equality in housing.”

“For 30 years – since its establishment in 1991 – the Fair Housing Testing Program has played a critical role in helping the Department of Justice root out discrimination that might otherwise go undetected,” said Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Karlan. “Today’s settlement reflects the Department’s continued commitment to uncover and eliminate discrimination in all forms and to ensure equal access to housing regardless of race.”

Under the consent decree, the defendants will establish a settlement fund of \$15,000 to compensate victims of Donovan's alleged discriminatory practices and pay a civil penalty of \$2,500 to the United States. The agreement prohibits the defendants from engaging in further acts of discrimination and requires them to implement nondiscriminatory standards and procedures, undergo fair housing training, and provide periodic reports to the department.

This case is being handled by Eastern District of New York Assistant U.S. Attorney Rachel G. Balaban, along with Trial Attorney Katherine A. Raimondo of the Civil Rights Division's Housing and Civil Enforcement Section.

Individuals who believe they may have experienced discrimination at Village Realty should contact the Justice Department toll-free at 1-800-896-7743 or by email at [fairhousing@usdoj.gov](mailto:fairhousing@usdoj.gov). Individuals may be entitled to relief from the settlement fund if they (1) are African American; (2) visited or called Village Realty to inquire about units available for rent prior to March 31, 2019; and (3) were denied the opportunity to rent a unit or provided untrue or incomplete information about available rental units. The Civil Rights Division enforces the federal Fair Housing Act, which prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, familial status, national origin and disability. More information about the department's fair housing enforcement can be found at [www.justice.gov/fairhousing](http://www.justice.gov/fairhousing).