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NEWS RELEASE

GREATER NEW ORLEANS FAIR HOUSING ACTION CENTER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FAIR HOUSING CENTER SETTLES LAWSUIT AGAINST ST. BERNARD PARISH

Chief Judge Helen G. Berrigan U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Louisiana approved a Consent Decree (the Decree) today settling Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center v. St. Bernard Parish et al, Civil Action No. 06-7185. In October 2006, the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center (GNOFHAC) and Wallace Rodrigue, a St. Bernard Parish resident and property owner, instituted this suit, alleging that St. Bernard Parish ordinances restricting the rental of single-family homes to the blood-relatives of property owners, as well as ordinances restricting the redevelopment of multi-family housing in the Parish were enacted with the intent and effect of discriminating against minorities, including those displaced from the hurricanes, in violation of the Fair Housing Act of 1968 as amended, 42 U.S.C. § 3601 et seq; 42 U.S.C. §§ 1981, 1982, and 1983.

GNOFHAC alleged that, according to the most recent census data, the vast majority (88%) of residents in St. Bernard Parish are white, while African Americans constitute only 7.6% of the Parish population, and that, in contrast, St. Bernard Parish's immediate neighbor, Orleans Parish, is majority-minority, with African Americans constituting 67.3% of the Orleans Parish population. GNOFHAC further alleged that within St. Bernard Parish, white individuals own 93% of all owner-occupied housing, and 79% of white residents live in owner-occupied housing. African Americans own only 4.5% of owner-occupied households, and minorities rely much more heavily on rental properties, with nearly half (45%) of African Americans in rental units.

Since greater numbers of African Americans were displaced by the 2005 Hurricanes, the group continues to have a great need for rental housing. An estimated 272,000 of those displaced by Hurricane Katrina in Orleans Parish are African-American, accounting for 73% of the population in the Parish affected by the hurricane. GNOFHAC alleged that St. Bernard Parish enacted the multi-family moratorium, single-family rental moratorium, single-family conditional use permit ordinance, and blood relative ordinance after the hurricanes with the discriminatory purpose and effect of perpetuating segregation in St. Bernard Parish and preventing African Americans from moving into the Parish after the hurricanes.

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The Decree prohibits St. Bernard Parish from violating the Fair Housing Act and permanently enjoins the Parish from re-enacting the blood-relative ordinance. In addition, the Decree requires St. Bernard Parish to provide GNOFHAC with a complete copy of all applications for a permissive use permit to rent a single-family and a list of the dates for all meetings at which such applications shall be considered, including hearings before the St. Bernard Planning Commission and St. Bernard Council. St. Bernard Parish will pay monetary damages in the amount of \$20,000.00 to GNOFHAC and \$15,500.00 to Mr. Rodrigue.

James Perry, GNOFHAC Executive Director comments, "We are pleased that St. Bernard Parish officials have chosen to bring closure to this issue. We hope that the consent decree will further perpetuate open housing throughout the New Orleans area, as rental housing opportunities are in such high demand after the devastation of Southeast Louisiana's rental housing stock after Hurricane Katrina. "

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The Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center (GNOFHAC) is a private non-profit organization. The Center was established by a group of concerned New Orleanians in 1995 with the help of the National Fair Housing Alliance and a grant from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. GNOFHAC is dedicated to eliminating housing discrimination and furthering equal housing opportunities through education, outreach, advocacy, and enforcement of fair housing laws across the metro New Orleans area.