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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Delaware County Homeowners Association Pays \$31,243 for Failure to Make Reasonable Accommodations for Residents with Disabilities

Fort Washington, PA -The Housing Equality Center of Pennsylvania (“HECP”) and four Delaware County residents with disabilities entered into a conciliation agreement resolving federal housing discrimination complaints against the Valleybrook Homeowners Association (“Valleybrook”) for violating the disability portion of the federal Fair Housing Act.

Between August 2017 and February 2018, HECP received complaints from four individuals who live in the Village of Valleybrook in Chester Heights, Pennsylvania. All four requested reasonable accommodations for reserved parking spaces near their units due to disabilities that impaired their ability to walk long distances. The residents were told by Valleybrook that they would not be permitted to have reserved spaces and would have to pay for all costs associated with unreserved handicapped spaces themselves.

HECP assisted the four residents with attempting to negotiate reasonable accommodations and made multiple contacts with members of the Homeowners Association in order to educate them on their obligation to comply with the Fair Housing Act. When these attempts at resolution failed HECP conducted an investigation, documenting the unwillingness of Valleybrook to allow reserved parking spaces for residents with disabilities, and assisted the individuals with filing complaints with the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity.

Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, known as the Fair Housing Act, makes it unlawful to discriminate in connection to any housing related transactions, based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, or familial status. Housing providers are obligated under this law to permit reasonable accommodations, or changes in policies or practices, when necessary for residents with disabilities to use and enjoy their dwelling. Disability has been protected under the Fair Housing Act since 1988.

“A housing provider’s refusal to allow reasonable accommodations can have a significant effect on the lives of people with disabilities. The denial of an individual’s rights to a reserved handicapped parking space can result in increased day-to-day physical pain and worsening of the symptoms of their disabilities as they are forced to walk longer distances. A reserved parking space is a relatively simple accommodation to provide and courts have established that it is the housing provider’s responsibility to bear the cost of installing a reserved parking space as a reasonable accommodation.” said Rachel Wentworth, Executive Director of HECP.

One of the complainants encouraged others to come forward if they have been denied their rights saying, "Fair housing and disability rights are important tenets of our society and they must be respected and upheld. You deserve what the law entitles you to and no entity, no one person, is above the law. Keep fighting, it is worth it in the end for yourself and for those that would follow in your footsteps but are reluctant to do so for fear of reprisal or stigma."

Valleybrook admitted no wrongdoing, but signed an agreement that will result in payments totaling \$31,243 to the four residents and 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 persons with disabilities. Additionally, Valleybrook has agreed to participate in a comprehensive fair housing training and to revise the HOA bylaws to comply with the Fair Housing Act.

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 discrimination at over 47,000 units of housing, opening these units to members of the protected classes. HECP’s investigations are funded by the Fair Housing Initiatives Program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

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.