

12,000 May Be Eligible For Fed Aid

RALEIGH — More than 12,000 North Carolina families who lived in certain federally subsidized housing projects across the state may be eligible for refunds of up to \$500 for illegal rent increases they paid four years ago, according to legal services of North Carolina Executive Director Denny Ray.

"The refunds are part of a \$60 million settlement between the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Legal Services lawyers who filed class action lawsuits in 1975," said Ray. "Those lawsuits were filed on behalf of an estimated 500,000 tenants in 5,000 affected housing projects across the country."

Ray noted that the settlement is the largest in the nation's history in a consumer class action case.

He said that of 76 of the 5,000 affected housing projects are located in North Carolina.

Persons who lived in a so-called Section 236 housing project between February 1, 1975, and September 30 1977, may be eligible for refunds but must file claims before next January 31.

The Section 236 program was created by the 1968 Housing Act to provide apartments for families who earned too much to qualify for public housing but too little to be able to afford housing in the private market.

The projects are able to charge low rents because HUD subsidized their mortgages.

The lawsuit were filed in U.S. District Court in Washington after HUD refused to obey the law and pay for increased utility costs in the housing projects. Since the department would not pay the bills, the project owners and managers increased rents to cover them.

In 1977, while the lawsuits were pending, Congress passed a second law, mandating HUD to make the payments from a special reserve fund.

Last year, former HUD secretary Patricia Roberts Harris ordered the department to settle the lawsuits.

Under that settlement, which was completed in September, five Legal Services lawyers who filed the lawsuits agreed to oversee the disbursement of the refunds, and not the federal housing department.

The lawyers have invested the \$60 million and the income that the investments generate will pay for processing the refunds and publicizing them. The lawyers have hired a private firm to handle the refunds and J. Walter Thompson advertising firm to put together a \$150,000 radio and TV campaign to alert eligible families of the refunds.

HUD has sent claim forms to all the involved projects, but the lawyers estimate that as many as half of those eligible for a refund no longer live in the projects.

Ray said that in North Carolina, persons who may be eligible for refunds should contact the manager of the Section 236 housing projects or call the national claims office toll free at 800/824-7980.

He said that persons needing assistance in filling out the claims form should contact their local legal services office.

Projects in the Durham areas that are affected are Hardee Street, 1222 Naples Place, Durham; Cheek Road, 1835 Cheek Road, Durham; Franklin Court, Elm Street, Louisville; Young Avenue, Wilson & Moving Street, Henderson.



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