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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Regina Wallace, Jerline Washington, HOPE Fair Housing Center and RAMP Center For Independent Living vs. University Village and University Village Management et. al.
13 – CV – 5485

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Large DeKalb Apartment Complex Accused of Housing Discrimination
Two Individuals, Civil Rights and Independent Living Organizations File Federal Lawsuit
Against University Village

CHICAGO, IL – Regina Wallace, a woman with a disability seeking housing from University Village in DeKalb, RAMP Center for Independent Living (RAMP) and HOPE Fair Housing Center (HOPE) have filed a housing discrimination lawsuit against University Village, a large

multi-family housing provider in DeKalb. Ms. Wallace and the organizations allege discrimination by University Village and several of its agents against people with disabilities in violation of the federal Fair Housing Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Ms. Wallace was refused an accessible apartment, harassed with notices of eviction, and eventually forced to relocate. Based on false promises that she would be provided an accessible ground floor unit, Regina Wallace, who uses assistive devices for mobility, relinquished her prior apartment only to discover on moving day that she was being placed in a third floor walk-up at University Village. Her requests that a live-in aide be permitted to care for her in the inaccessible unit were also denied based on discriminatory reasons. Ms. Wallace was charged excessive monthly fees instead of adjusting her rent date to coincide with her monthly disability insurance payments, and vacant first floor units were rented to others. Moreover, University Village grounds and offices are not generally accessible. When Ms. Wallace continued to request accommodations and make complaints on her own and through RAMP, Center for Independent Living, University Village began the process to evict Ms. Wallace. When Ms. Wallace attempted to find accessible housing elsewhere, University Village gave an inaccurate and false bad reference to the DeKalb Housing Authority. HOPE Fair Housing Center aided Ms. Wallace in providing accurate and truthful information and causing DeKalb Housing Authority to reverse its decision, clearing the way for her to receive accessible housing.

“The facts of this case reflect that University Village treated Ms. Wallace with disdain and a level of disrespect that we find both inexcusable and unconscionable,” stated Julie Bosma, Executive Director for RAMP. “Resolutions to this situation were easily available every step of the way and yet ignored. RAMP is committed to rectifying this, not only for Ms. Wallace, but for all others that are denied their rights to accessible housing.”

University Village received federal assistance for its development and has continued to sign long term contracts with the federal Government in order to receive federal rental subsidies. Therefore, they are required to provide discrimination-free housing and accommodate people with disabilities under the federal Fair Housing Act and has an additional requirement, in exchange for receiving federal monies, to comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In addition, University Village’s rental office is a place of public accommodation, and thus must be accessible to individuals with disabilities. An administrative complaint was originally filed with the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity in Chicago. That office continues to investigate the defendants’ compliance with Section 504.

“As a recipient of federal dollars and provider of affordable housing, University Village is obligated to comply with both the federal Fair Housing Act and 504,” says Anne Houghtaling, HOPE’s Executive Director. “It is astonishing to me that we found this level of disregard for the law. We intend to correct these violations and change University Village’s unlawful policies and practices.”

University Village is managed by University Village Management Company.

The case was filed on August 1, 2013 in the United States District Court, Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division (Chicago), and assigned to Judge John Z. Lee. The plaintiffs in this case seek a court order preventing future discrimination, changes in policies and procedures so that future interactions with people with disabilities will be positive and fair, and damages.

RAMP is a Center for Independent Living (www.rampcil.org) that is a non-profit, non-residential organization, providing services and advocacy for persons with disabilities in DeKalb, Boone, Winnebago and Stephenson counties. RAMP's mission is to promote an accessible society that allows and expects full participation by people with disabilities. RAMP seeks to accomplish its mission by assisting individuals to live independently, make changes in their own lives, seek peer support, obtain resources and remove barriers that threaten their ability to live independently. RAMP advocates for the implementation of current laws, promotion of needed legislation and improvement of existing systems for persons with disabilities while working to diminish negative attitudes that threaten to impede equal access.

HOPE Fair Housing Center (www.hopefair.org) was founded in 1968, and works to eliminate housing discrimination and to ensure equal housing opportunities for all people through education and outreach, public policy initiatives, training, advocacy, investigation of fair housing violations, and enforcement. HOPE is dedicated to eliminating housing discrimination and segregation because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, familial status, or any other characteristics protected under state or local laws.

The plaintiffs in this case are represented by **Soule, Bradtke & Lambert**, a law firm specializing in federal litigation and systemic discrimination cases.

The next steps in the litigation are that the defendants will be formally served and the Court is expected to set an initial court date shortly.