



---

## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:

Wednesday, April 29, 2009

**CONTACT: Mary Broz-Vaughan**

Director of Communications, Legislation & Consumer Education  
(804) 367-9142 or [Mary.Broz-Vaughan@dpor.virginia.gov](mailto:Mary.Broz-Vaughan@dpor.virginia.gov)

# Virginia Celebrates Fair Housing Month

## *Commonwealth obtains record verdict in sexual harassment case*

**RICHMOND** – In conjunction with national Fair Housing Month – which commemorates the 41<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the historic Fair Housing Act – the agency responsible for enforcing fair housing law today announced that a Charlottesville landlord was ordered to pay \$200,000 for sexually harassing a female tenant.

In a final judgment entered March 20, 2009, Albemarle County Circuit Court Judge Cheryl N. Higgins ordered Barry Schmidt to pay \$190,000 in damages, plus attorney's fees totaling more than \$10,000. At the September 2008 trial, the jury awarded \$15,000 in compensatory damages and \$175,000 in punitive damages to a female tenant subjected to harassment by Schmidt.

The verdict is the largest ever obtained by the Commonwealth of Virginia in a fair housing case. Assistant Attorney General R. Thomas Payne, II, represented the Commonwealth. Claire E. Curry, a staff attorney with the Legal Aid Justice Center in Charlottesville, assisted the complainant as part of the center's mission to help low-income, underserved individuals.

The Commonwealth filed suit against Schmidt in 2005 for demanding sexual favors from Walker. Federal and state fair housing laws prohibit housing discrimination on the basis of sex as well as protected classes of race, color, religion, national origin, elderliness (defined as age 55 or older), familial status (defined as having children under age 18), and disability.

Fair housing laws protect people from bias when trying to rent an apartment, buy a house, obtain a mortgage, or purchase homeowner's insurance. Fair housing requirements apply to all housing providers – property managers, owners, landlords, real estate agents, banks, savings institutions, credit unions, insurance companies, mortgage lenders, and appraisers.

**Individuals who believe they may be victims of housing discrimination should contact the Virginia Fair Housing Office toll-free at 1-888-551-FAIR (3247).** The agency also offers free informational seminars to housing consumers and providers who wish to learn more about their rights and responsibilities under the Fair Housing Act.

###