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**Federal Class Action Against City of Antioch Documents
Police Targeting of African American Tenants**

*Press Conference at noon today in the Federal Building
450 Golden Gate Ave, 18th Floor, in San Francisco*

San Francisco - The City of Antioch and its police department are engaged in a concerted campaign of intimidation, harassment and discrimination against African Americans who receive federally funded Section 8 housing rent assistance, say community members and attorneys from four Bay Area non-profit civil rights organizations who today filed a class action lawsuit in federal court.

"There is no question that the City and its police department are targeting Section 8 families, particularly African American recipients," said attorney Brad Seligman of the Impact Fund, based in Berkeley. "The Police have a deliberate policy of coercion, intimidation and threats that target these Section 8 families and their landlords. The City's goal is to force these families to move out of town."

Plaintiff Alyce Payne moved to Antioch with her children to show her family they could "make it" outside of Oakland and so that her children could attend public schools there. But after her landlord received several letters from the police department, her tenancy was terminated. Ms. Payne relocated her family out of the City.

"Everyone should have the right to live in peace in the community they choose," said Payne, who testified before the Antioch City Council about the discrimination she encountered from police officers. "We all want to live in a place where our families and our rights are respected."

Ms. Payne and the other named plaintiffs in the case, all African American women, document that the Antioch Police Department:

- Established a special unit in 2006, the Community Action Team (CAT) for the purpose of targeting Section 8 residents, and the unit has directed the majority of its activities at African American families.
- Frequently searches the homes of African American families in the Section 8 program (or those erroneously believed to participate in the program) without their consent and without a warrant in an attempt to gather evidence to be used against Section 8 participants.

- Engages in a pattern of informing neighbors of African-American Section 8 households that the household is receiving Section 8 housing assistance and suggesting that neighbors file nuisance or disturbance reports against the Section 8 household.
- Threatens landlords with letters and visits by suggesting that landlords will be held liable for the activities of Section 8 tenants, and police officers actively encourage landlords to evict Section 8 tenants.
- Attempts to pressure the local Housing Authority in charge of the Section 8 program to terminate the voucher benefits of tenants whom the police department has targeted. Over 70% of these attempts have been directed at African Americans. A majority of these complaints were not sustained by the Housing Authority.

The lawsuit claims that the varied forms of coercion, intimidation and threats carried out by the City and the Antioch Police Department violate state and federal laws, including the Fair Housing Act; the Fourth Amendment; and the Equal Protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which prohibits intentional discrimination on the basis of race. It seeks an injunction against the City of Antioch to force it to stop its discriminatory and unlawful targeting of African American tenants. Filing suit on behalf of the plaintiffs are the Impact Fund, Public Advocates Inc., Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area and the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California.

The racial tensions that led to the targeting of the tenants in Antioch reflect a hostile response to shifting demographics tied to the real estate crisis. The downturn in the housing market has made many Antioch homes more affordable to renters who can help owners to meet mortgage payments, including participants in the federally subsidized Section 8 program. In the last five years, the number of Section 8 families in Antioch has risen by over 50%, to 1582, the majority of whom are African American. Over the same period, the African American population in Antioch has doubled, from 8,824 to 15,687, in a city of 101,000.

Attorneys for the plaintiffs say that the City has reacted with alarm and hostility to the newcomers, choosing to scapegoat them as the cause of the economic downturn. They point to legal documents filed today containing numerous public statements by the mayor, city council members and police officers characterizing Section 8 residents as unlawful and unwelcome.

Profiling by Income and Race

While only 25% of Antioch households rent their homes, 85% of investigations by the Antioch Police Department's CAT unit involve rental households. Although Section 8 participants make up only 5% of Antioch households (one-fifth of all rental housing), two-thirds of the CAT team investigations involve homes where voucher participants reside.

The brunt of investigations by the CAT unit falls disproportionately on African Americans: African Americans constitute only about 14% of Antioch households yet they are subject to two-thirds of all special unit investigations.

The lawsuit, which expands a previously-filed suit filed by Bay Area Legal Aid, seeks an injunction against the City of Antioch to force it to stop its discriminatory and unlawful targeting of African American tenants.

In addition to Brad Seligman of the Impact Fund, attorneys working on the case include Richard Marcantonio of Public Advocates; Alan Schlosser of the ACLU-NC; and Oren M. Sellstrom and Kendra Fox-Davis of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Right of the San Francisco Bay Area.

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