

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 7, 2006

CONTACT: Carla Wertheim, Executive Vice President,
Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council
PHONE: 414-278-1240

**FEDERAL RACE DISCRIMINATION LAWSUIT FILED
AGAINST MILWAUKEE HOME SELLERS**

Milwaukee, Wisconsin – The U.S. Department of Justice filed a racial discrimination lawsuit late last week against homeowner Edith Halvorsen, her real estate broker, Phyllis Hasenstab, and Hasenstab's employer, RE/MAX Realty 100. The suit is brought on behalf of Tami Doss, an African-American woman who was a potential buyer for Halvorsen's home, and Doss's real estate agent, Margaret Silkey.

Doss is a principal in the Milwaukee Public School System and therefore is required to live in the City of Milwaukee. A first-time homebuyer, she enlisted Silkey's services to purchase a four-bedroom house for herself and her two college-age sons. Halvorsen's home, located on West Mount Vernon Avenue near Blue Mound Road, was particularly desirable to Doss because it was near her workplace.

The suit alleges that Halvorsen and Hasenstab violated federal fair housing law by refusing to allow Silkey to show Halvorsen's house to Doss because of Doss's race. In July 2005, Silkey learned that Halvorsen's home was going to be put on the market, and contacted Halvorsen to tell her that she had a prospective buyer for the house. Halvorsen asked Silkey if her client was black and made statements indicating that she did not want to sell the property to a black person. Halvorsen said that when blacks moved into her sister's neighborhood, property values fell. Halvorsen told Silkey that she "just could not do that" to her neighbors. Silkey told Halvorsen that African Americans moving into a neighborhood do not cause property values to fall, but that not maintaining property causes values to go down. Silkey closed the interaction by telling Halvorsen that she would sell the home to whomever had the money to purchase it.

Shortly thereafter, Silkey saw that Halvorsen's home had a "for sale" sign outside the property. She contacted Phyllis Hasenstab, the real estate agent listed on the sign, to attempt to schedule an appointment to show the home to Doss. Hasenstab did not return Silkey's calls. Silkey then called the Multiple Listing Service (MLS), and told an MLS employee of Halvorsen's discriminatory remarks. She indicated that she wanted to ensure that Hasenstab was aware of Halvorsen's discriminatory comments.

In early August 2005, Silkey made another attempt to contact Hasenstab and RE/MAX Realty 100 to schedule an appointment for Doss to see Halvorsen's home. She was informed by a receptionist that the listing included instructions that Silkey was not permitted to show the property. When Silkey later asked Hasenstab why she had been excluded, Hasenstab told her it

was because Silkey had notified the MLS about Halvorsen's discriminatory comments. Shortly thereafter, Halvorsen sold her home to a white man.

Silkey contacted the Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council (MMFHC) and filed complaints. MMFHC counseled her on her legal rights and options for remedy. With MMFHC's assistance, Silkey filed an administrative complaint with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), alleging that Halvorsen, Hasenstab and RE/MAX Realty 100 had discriminated against them based on Doss's race. HUD conducted an investigation. In September of this year, HUD determined that there was reasonable cause to believe that violations of the Federal Fair Housing Act had occurred. In October, the defendants opted to have the case heard in federal court rather than by a HUD Administrative Law Judge, and the U.S. Department of Justice assumed responsibility for the case on behalf of Doss and Silkey. The case has been assigned to U.S. District Court Judge J.P. Stadtmueller.

The lawsuit seeks monetary and other damages from Halvorsen, Hasenstab and RE/MAX Realty 100. Doss was "offended, hurt and shocked" by the experience, and stopped her search for a home to purchase as a result. She told HUD investigators that she "felt a sadness that people still feel this way." Despite the fact that she was not yet ready to retire after over two decades as a real estate agent, Silkey decided to leave the real estate business after this experience, as she was disillusioned by the lack of ethics exhibited by the defendants and because she felt her reputation in the business had been damaged.

"The type of discrimination experienced by Tami Doss is hurtful in many ways," said MMFHC President and CEO William R. Tisdale. "Obviously, it hurt Ms. Doss as an individual, but discrimination also has a ripple effect on an entire community. It harms our economy by impeding ethical businesses like Margaret Silkey's. Without Ms. Silkey's integrity and persistence, this discrimination would have gone unchecked, but clearly Ms. Silkey paid a price. Housing discrimination perpetuates our segregated housing patterns and marginalizes many people from full participation in our society. It is unfair to everyone who would choose to live in an inclusive, integrated neighborhood. Discrimination hurts all of us."

###

MMFHC is a private, non-profit organization whose purpose is to promote fair housing throughout the State of Wisconsin by guaranteeing all people equal access to housing opportunities and by creating and maintaining racially and economically integrated housing patterns. It operates satellite offices in Dane County (the Fair Housing Center of Greater Madison) and in Northeast Wisconsin (the Fair Housing Center of Greater Madison).

Persons who feel they may have experienced illegal housing discrimination should call 414-278-1240, or 1-877-647-FAIR, a toll-free number, if not in the 414 area code. All services to victims of illegal housing discrimination are free of charge.