

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Happy Wanderer Community Association and President Gord Munro Settle Resident's Civil Rights Case

October 23, 2024 - The Happy Wanderer Community Association (HWHOA), in Indio, California, and its President, Gord Munro, have reached a mediated settlement in a California Civil Rights Division (CRD) case filed by a resident. The underlying case involved alleged unreasonable restrictions related to residents' service animals, and protected class harassment and discrimination by HWHOA and its managers, residents, and Board of Directors. Mediation was facilitated by the CRD (formerly the Department of Fair Employment and Housing). HOAdvocate.com's Douglas Kruschen advocated for the affected resident and Respondents were represented by Julie Balbini, Esq. of Fiore Racobs & Powers. Balbini is also President of the Community Associations Institute's Coachella Valley Chapter.

Facing the likelihood of prolonged and costly litigation, HWHOA and Mr. Munro decided to settle, acknowledging the need to address and rectify their actions. The settlement includes several key resolutions for the affected resident:

- **Service Animal Policy Revisions:** Respondents agreed to make significant changes to its Service Animal Policy, removing unreasonable restrictions and amending the language to better reflect the rights of residents to keep and maintain service animals within the HOA community.
- **Charitable Donations:** Respondents will make a \$1,000 donation to the Inland Fair Housing and Mediation Board, a 501(c)(3) fair housing advocacy group, and a \$500 donation to Our Father's Persistent Love Ministries, Inc., a nonprofit supporting incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals.
- **Member Education:** Respondents will provide a letter of resolution to all HWHOA members acknowledging that they, and all members and residents, are required to comply with fair housing regulations relating to service animals including refraining from harassment, discrimination, and retaliation against protected individuals.

Additionally, Mr. Munro, the entire HWHOA Board of Directors, and its Community Manager are required to complete three hours of fair housing education to help ensure their future compliance with state and federal laws. Mr. Kruschen remarked,

“With CRD requiring the completion of formal training, the potential for personal liability in future claims is heightened. The HOA and its members should not bear the cost of defending such claims.”

Mr. Kruschen further emphasized, “The HWHOA, like all HOAs in California, must foster an inclusive and supportive community for all residents, including those in protected classes. The bravery of residents who file complaints enables the CRD to monitor HOAs and prevent future issues.”

This mediated settlement highlights the importance of HOAs adhering to fair housing laws, providing reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities, and supporting residents who experience harassment, discrimination, or retaliation. It also underscores the need to elect Directors and hire managers committed to legal compliance, irrespective of personal beliefs.

“In California, CRD settlement agreements are public records,” added Mr. Kruschen. “HOA members should perform annual due diligence by requesting copies of financial audits and any conciliation or settlement agreements. This can be easily done by contacting your HOA and making the request pursuant to Civil Code § 5205.”

For more information or to discuss advocacy services, please contact:

Douglas Kruschen
HelpMe@HOAdvocate.com
(805) 751-5HOA