

MLRI, NLS Settle Civil-Rights Lawsuit Against Lowell Housing Authority

Lowell housing discrimination case settled

by [Michelle Hillman](#), *Boston Business Journal*
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A longstanding civil-rights lawsuit between tenants of Lowell public housing and the Lowell Housing Authority has been settled.

The Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, Neighborhood Legal Services and Foley Hoag LLP announced the settlement on Tuesday. The agreement expands housing choices to former tenants of the Julian D. Steele Housing complex and applicants for Lowell housing.

The lawsuit challenged the relocation of public housing tenants in Lowell, Mass., following the demolition of their development in 2003.

The Superior Court case was filed in 2001 by hundreds of families from the Julian D. Steele public housing complex in Lowell who were relocated to other housing to make way for demolition. Joint plaintiffs in the lawsuit included thousands of extremely low-income applicants on the waiting lists of the Lowell Housing Authority. The lawsuit alleged that the Lowell Housing Authority relocated the Julien D. Steele tenants to the more racially-segregated areas of Lowell and that the City of Lowell sited “replication” housing required by a special 2000 law in higher-minority, higher-crime and less desirable areas. The plaintiffs claimed that the city’s and Lowell Housing Authority’s actions perpetuated segregation throughout Lowell and did not affirmatively further fair housing as required by state and federal civil rights laws.

The settlement, which was approved by Judge Paul Troy on Aug. 26, was the result of a collaborative effort in which plaintiffs and their attorneys worked for several months with the defendants and their attorneys with assistance and resources provided by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).

The settlement creates a program to help the former Julian D. Steele residents move to good housing in neighborhoods of their choice, including in “opportunity areas” that are racially integrated. Also, the city will provide replication units in these “opportunity areas.”