



For Immediate Release

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**LANDMARK CIVIL RIGHTS AGREEMENT WILL INCREASE HOUSING
ACCESSIBILITY ACROSS COUNTRY**

**Nation's Fifth-Largest Housing Developer to Retrofit Record Number of Apartments for
People with Disabilities, Create National Accessibility Fund**

WASHINGTON, DC – January 13, 2010 – Today, the National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA) and its member fair housing organizations in Atlanta, Ga., Melbourne, Fla., and Napa and Marin, Calif., announced a landmark agreement with the A.G. Spanos Companies to increase housing accessibility for people with disabilities. Under the agreement, the nation's fifth largest builder of residential real estate will retrofit properties in **Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Florida, Kansas, Missouri, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, and Texas** at an estimated cost of \$7.4 million.

The agreement initiates a productive partnership between the Spanos Companies, NFHA, and its member fair housing agencies to make apartments accessible to individuals who use wheelchairs and people with limited mobility. It amicably resolves a lawsuit filed by NFHA and its members against the Spanos Companies under the federal Fair Housing Act's accessibility requirements, and covers 123 properties built since March 1991. The agreement also establishes a \$4.2 million national fund to provide retrofitting grants to people with disabilities across the country.

“At our very first meeting, Michael Spanos, Executive Vice President A.G. Spanos Companies, made it clear that he wanted to be in compliance with the Fair Housing Act,” said **Shanna L. Smith, President and CEO of NFHA**. “Indeed, the wide-ranging relief described in this agreement is a testament to Mr. Spanos's commitment not only to comply with the Fair Housing Act but to provide comprehensive remedies guaranteed to increase the availability of accessible housing to thousands of people across the country, whether they live in Spanos-built properties or not.”

The Fair Housing Act, as amended in 1988, has required since 1991 that builders, developers and architects design and construct multi-family buildings so that both apartments and common areas such as lobbies, community rooms and recreational areas are accessible to the growing number of Americans with disabilities.

During 2006, NFHA and its members examined Spanos Companies apartment units in California, Florida, and Georgia. In June 2007, NFHA, Metro Fair Housing Services of Atlanta,

Ga., The Fair Housing Continuum of Melbourne, Fla., Fair Housing of Marin, Calif., and Fair Housing of Napa Valley, Calif. filed suit in federal district court in San Francisco. Michael Allen, Stephen Dane and Tom Keary of Relman & Dane, PLLC in Washington, DC, represented the plaintiffs.

The agreement provides for the following:

Retrofit Requirements: The agreement calls for renovations in 82 buildings comprising approximately 12,300 units to make them accessible for people with disabilities. The retrofits will be completed within 36 months.

National Accessibility Fund: Another 41 buildings could not be retrofitted because of structural or topographical complications. To compensate for the lost housing opportunities for people with disabilities, Spanos generously agreed to establish the NFHA Accessibility Fund, to which the company will contribute \$4.2 million over five years. NFHA will use the Fund to make grants available to homeowners and renters who require modifications or other assistance in making their homes accessible. NFHA will work with local and national organizations to secure matching funds and donated labor to be able to provide grants to the maximum number of people possible nationwide.

Local Accessibility Funds: Spanos will contribute \$750,000 over three years to be used by the five plaintiffs to establish local retrofit funds. Each fair housing center will establish a program to provide grants, directly or through support organizations, to people with disabilities. In addition to the national fund, NFHA will operate a local fund for Washington, DC, residents.

Building Accessible Housing Coalition: The agreement provides \$40,000 to support the creation of an accessibility coalition to be co-chaired by NFHA and Metro Fair Housing Services in Atlanta, Ga. The coalition, including builders, architects, social services providers, medical professionals, city/county planners, fair housing practitioners, and disability advocates, will identify new construction designs and modification needs to help increase the supply of accessible housing nationwide. A report with recommendations will be released by the coalition within 18 months.

National Media Campaign: Spanos generously agreed to support NFHA's *A Richer Life* multi-media campaign with a \$100,000 contribution. NFHA created the first national media campaign to promote inclusive communities as a proactive step to encourage neighbors to welcome people who are different from themselves because of their race, color, religion, national origin, disability, or other personal characteristic. www.aricherlife.org

Damages and Attorney Fees: The agreement also includes \$950,000 in compensatory damages to the plaintiffs and \$1.325 million in attorneys' fees and litigation costs. The agreement will be monitored over a five year period.

“We are so pleased that Michael Spanos agreed to support a coalition to explore new ways to assist builders and others to meet the needs of people with disabilities. It is important that everyone involved in housing have a seat at the table for this ground-breaking project – including

architects, developers, builders and fair housing practitioners as well as disability advocates and agencies providing services to people with disabilities. Most importantly, this project will assist people who need and use accessible housing. Any one of us might need accessible housing during our life time and this coalition will look to the future and make recommendations for builders, planners and governments to increase both housing accessibility and affordability for people with disabilities.”

-- Foster Corbin, Executive Director of Metro Fair Housing Services of Atlanta, Ga.

“While Mr. Spanos could have relied solely on the National Accessibility Fund to address our needs, instead he thoughtfully agreed to support our local efforts. The local accessibility fund will allow Fair Housing Napa Valley to help disabled veterans, children, and adults overcome housing barriers. Our agency is delighted to collaborate with the Senior Services Program of the Volunteer Center of Napa Valley and Disability Services & Legal Center in Napa to help fund modifications to make housing accessible for their clients. One out of five households in Napa County has at least one person who is disabled. This fund has the potential to make an enormous difference in the lives of Napa County residents.”

-- Kathryn Winter, Executive Director of Fair Housing Napa Valley, Calif.

“This agreement marks a major step forward for people with disabilities and we congratulate Michael Spanos on his forward looking attitude. Fair Housing of Marin will be able to help make housing accessible for Marin and Sonoma County residents with disabilities. FHOM will work with two well-regarded disability advocacy groups in our region, Marin Center for Independent Living (MCIL) in Marin County and Disability Services and Legal Center in Sonoma County (DSLCL), to administer the accessibility fund. These two groups cover an area of one million residents.”

-- Nancy Kenyon, Executive Director of Fair Housing of Marin, Calif.

“This valuable contribution by Mr. Spanos to the local accessibility fund provides the opportunity for The Continuum to partner with local disability organizations to increase accessible housing throughout Central Florida. We hope to double the impact of our partnership with Spanos by requesting matching funds from local organizations and governments. The Continuum hopes this agreement will remind permitting officials and builders across Florida of their Fair Housing Act responsibilities. Building accessible housing from the start will protect the civil rights of those with disabilities and ultimately save hundreds of thousands of dollars.”

-- David Baade, Executive Director of Fair Housing Continuum, Inc. of Melbourne, FL

For a copy of the stipulated judgment, which includes a list of properties affected, please visit www.nationalfairhousing.org.

*Founded in 1988, the **National Fair Housing Alliance** is a consortium of more than 220 private, non-profit fair housing organizations, state and local civil rights agencies, and individuals from throughout the United States. Headquartered in Washington, DC, the National Fair Housing Alliance, through comprehensive education, advocacy and enforcement programs, provides equal access to apartments, houses, mortgage loans and insurance policies for all residents of the nation.*

***Metro Fair Housing Services, Inc.** is a nonprofit civil rights organization founded in 1974 to combat blockbusting in DeKalb County, Georgia. MFHS is now a full service fair housing organizations investigating rental, sales and*

lending complaints. MFHA expanded its programs to provide tenant/landlord counseling and housing counseling to the residents of metropolitan Atlanta. MFHS is a HUD certified housing counseling agency.

***Fair Housing Napa Valley** is a nonprofit fair housing organization whose primary objectives are to promote equal opportunity in renting, purchasing, and advertising of housing; to educate people regarding federal and state fair housing laws; and to eliminate discriminatory housing practices. It furthers its mission through education programs in the community regarding fair housing, training programs for housing providers including real estate professionals, research regarding housing discrimination in the community, advocacy for housing related issues, and fair housing counseling and investigation.*

***The Fair Housing Continuum, Inc.** is a private, nonprofit fair housing enforcement agency. The organization was incorporated in the State of Florida in October 1994. It is the agency's mission is to Ensure Equal Housing Opportunity and Eliminate Discrimination in Florida.*

***Fair Housing of Marin** has provided full fair housing services to the residents of Marin County, California since 1985. Our housing and foreclosure counseling, legal, affordable housing advocacy and school human rights programs have brought the message home to young and old alike that "People learn to live together by living together." Fair Housing of Marin has received numerous awards - from County organizations, the City of San Francisco and the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development; the latter for its pioneering work in equal rights for seniors and inclusive senior housing. It has provided supportive fair housing services in Sonoma and Contra Costa counties, while maintaining an active role with the Northern California Fair Housing Coalition and the National Fair Housing Alliance.*