

Antioch authorizes settlement in class-action discrimination suit

By Paul Burgarino
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ANTIOCH -- City leaders authorized a \$360,000 settlement of a class-action federal lawsuit over alleged police discrimination against black renters Tuesday, putting an end to a four-year dispute.

The 2008 federal suit claims that Antioch police targeted black residents receiving housing aid through the federal Section 8 voucher program through a policy of arrests and harassment. Antioch continues to emphatically deny the allegations.

City Manager Jim Jakel said Antioch was approached with a settlement offer by attorneys for the plaintiffs that was lower than the cost of going to trial, and he believed it represented a good economic decision.

The five named plaintiffs in the case will drop the suit for a shared payment of \$180,000, according to the settlement. The plaintiffs' lawyers would receive the same amount.

That amount is a fraction of what was originally sought, city officials said in a news release Wednesday.

The settlement includes no finding that Antioch police violated any laws and will obey the law as it always has, Nerland said.

Brad Seligman, the plaintiffs' lead attorney, said city is now subject to federal court oversight for the next three years to ensure that it is not "focusing on Section 8 African-Americans."

"It ensures that Antioch doesn't go back to the bad old days," said Seligman, of the Impact Fund.

Antioch must also provide the plaintiffs' lawyers with copies of letters it sends to

the Contra Costa Housing Authority about Section 8-related complaints.

Bay Area Legal Aid sued the city in May 2008 on behalf of five black women receiving Section 8 assistance who accused the police department's Community Action Team, or CAT, of racial discrimination. The American Civil Liberties Union and three other Bay Area civil rights groups later sought class-action status for all Section 8 recipients in Antioch.

The class-action was certified last fall to include all blacks "who have held, currently hold, or may hold Section 8 vouchers and all members of their households, who reside or will reside in Antioch," though only four of the plaintiffs were eligible to receive money from a jury verdict.

In two other related federal suits, a jury ruled against an Antioch resident who claimed police harassment, and a family of Antioch landlords dropped their suit.

"Throughout the long process of litigation, city residents of every race and background consistently voiced their support for community policing and the Antioch Police Department," Jakel said.

The agreement will be approved once the city's joint risk insurance pool officially takes action.

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