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Department
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CONTACT:

For the State of Arizona Department of Housing:

Daniel Romm

Arizona Department of Housing

602-771-1008

Daniel.Romm@azhousing.gov

For the National Association of the Deaf:

Howard Rosenblum, CEO

National Association of the Deaf

Hrosenblum@nad.org

For Apache ASL Trails:

Mary Vargas

Stein & Vargas, LLP

240-793-3185

Mary.Vargas@steinvargas.com

STANDOFF WITH HUD OVER DEAF HOUSING COMMUNITY ENDS

Tempe, Ariz. – Ending a two-year legal standoff over the award-winning Apache ASL Trails community, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”) today announced that it has withdrawn its Letter of Findings and closed the investigation involving Apache ASL Trails. In a letter to Director Michael Trailor of the Arizona Department of Housing, HUD concluded that Section 504 *does permit* Apache ASL Trails to give priority in rental to those individuals who need the accessibility features of the units.

Today’s resolution comes with a promise from HUD that it will permit Apache ASL Trails to continue offering priority to applicants who need the unique accessibility features provided at the community.

Trailor, who has long championed the rights of deaf Arizonians to have full and equal opportunity to access the housing of their choice, applauded today’s resolution, saying, “All citizens have the right to be a vibrant part of their community, to choose where they want to live.”

After receiving approval from HUD in 2008 to build the low income apartment complex to provide accessible housing to individuals who were deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind, the 75 unit apartment complex in Tempe, Ariz., called “Apache ASL Trails” opened its doors and quickly became a thriving, barrier free, and vibrant community. In June of 2011, Apache ASL Trails won the prestigious Charles Edson Tax Credit Excellence Award for Accessible Design. Days later, HUD issued a Letter of Findings that placed a cloud over the successful community, saying that too many deaf people lived at

Apache ASL Trails. The State of Arizona, in support of Apache ASL Trails challenged the Letter of Findings and the two-year standoff began. In February of 2013, HUD issued a letter directing the City of Tempe to terminate the Section 8 vouchers that had been promised.

Apache ASL Trails fills a desperately needed void in accessible housing. In the United States, experts estimate that there are less than 400 units of low income housing that are accessible for individuals who are deaf. Apache ASL Trails was designed by a deaf architect and great care was taken to ensure that the community would be accessible and open to all. Features such as visual alarms, video access at the entrance, enhanced capacity for video relay use, open sight lines, reduced vibrations in the building design, and visual alerts on fans and disposals were built into every unit.

Perhaps more important than the physical features is the embracing of culture and language that allows residents to communicate in American Sign Language with the manager, their neighbors and with the hairdresser, doctor, and other service providers who have offices on the first floor. Hearing residents are provided interpreters so that they too can participate in the active social life at Apache ASL Trails. The motto of this wonderful and accessible housing is “Banish Extreme Loneliness.”

The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) submitted a letter with sign-ons from 75 other deaf organizations to HUD in April 2013 demanding that HUD respect the wishes of deaf and hard of hearing people to live where they want including at accessible housing such as Apache ASL Trails. Howard A. Rosenblum, CEO of the NAD, responds to the recent action by HUD, “The NAD is appreciative that HUD is doing the right thing with the withdrawal of the Letter of Findings, and urges HUD to promote more accessible housing for deaf and hard of hearing people across the country so that we have the same options that are available to everyone else.”

Erich Schwenker, the CEO of Cardinal Capital Management said, “Apache ASL Trails was the dream of the Deaf community in Arizona. HUD’s blessing of the rights of the residents and future residents of Apache ASL Trails to full and equal access to housing is a historic step forward. This is a vibrant, involved, and connected community where language and culture is respected and where inclusion and self-determination prevails.” Schwenker adds that “The next step is to make sure those who need and want this housing the most, have the same access to Section 8 vouchers that hearing individuals have.”

Director Traylor, Howard Rosenblum, Cardinal Capital Management and all of the staff and residents of Apache ASL Trails express deep appreciation to Congresswoman Kyrsten Sinema, Congressman Matt Salmon, and other members of the Arizona delegation who have come through on behalf of the residents of Apache ASL Trails and sought this resolution with HUD in an expedited fashion.

This resolution comes as a great relief to the residents, who have eloquently asserted their rights to be a part of their community and to have housing that is both safe and barrier free.

The Arizona Department of Housing provides programs and critical resources to the most vulnerable populations of the state while serving as a driver for economic development and leveraging private capital. Whether it is through their work to provide safe and affordable housing, assistance to help aid the homeless and special needs populations, or their ongoing efforts to prevent Arizonans from losing their homes, ADOH is committed to finding responsible and reasonable solutions to meet the housing needs for the people of Arizona.

The National Association of the Deaf is the nation’s premier civil rights organization of, by, and for deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Since 1880, the NAD has pursued its mission of preserving, protecting and promoting the civil, human and

linguistic rights of all deaf and hard of hearing people in the United States. The scope of the work at the NAD encompasses all areas of life including housing, education, employment, telecommunications, transportation, and more.

Apache ASL Trails is an award-winning 75 unit Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Property located in Tempe, Arizona. Apache ASL Trails provides unique and extensive services and amenities that are beneficial to people who are deaf, deaf-blind, and hard of hearing. Most importantly, Apache creates a barrier free environment that facilitates communication for its residents and alleviates issues of isolation, as well as health and safety hazards, while promoting full, equal, and integrated housing opportunities for all.