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Black Families Sue City of Portland, Prosper Portland and Legacy Emanuel Hospital and Health Center over Racist Destruction and Forced Displacement in the Historic Central Albina Neighborhood

Emanuel Displaced Persons Association 2 (EDPA2) and 27 Black survivors and descendants of families who lived, worked and thrived in the Central Albina neighborhood are suing the city of Portland, Prosper Portland (formerly known as the Portland Development Commission) and Legacy Emanuel Hospital and Health Center over the intentional and racist destruction and forced displacement of their homes.

“That home was our foundation, and the sense of community in that neighborhood is what made us thrive,” said Connie Mack, a plaintiff from the lawsuit. “I was taken out of my safe and loving community. I was moved into a neighborhood that saw me as a nuisance and to a school where I was one of three Black children.” The Mack family home was at 2732 N. Kerby Ave.

Starting in the late 1950s and into the early 1970s, the city, Prosper Portland (then PDC) and Legacy Emanuel acted in concert to forcibly displace hundreds of families from their homes and businesses in Central Albina. Between 1971 and 1973, PDC demolished an estimated 188 properties – 158 of which were residential and 30 of which were commercial. Those properties were inhabited by approximately 88 families, 83 individuals, 23 businesses, nine rental businesses and four church or community organizations. Of the 171 reported forcibly displaced households, 74% were Black, many of whom owned their homes free and clear.

For many decades, and continuing to this day, much of the demolished land sat vacant, serving as a constant reminder to the survivors and descendants of those forcibly displaced families of what they once had, what their family could have had for generations, and what was taken from them. For the plaintiffs, the loss of their family homes has meant a loss of inheritance, generational success, community and opportunity. The plaintiffs seek just restitution to compensate for the economic loss and noneconomic harm.

“Our homes were demolished so that the city and Legacy Emanuel could make a profit,” said Karen Smith, a plaintiff from the lawsuit. “As first-time homeowners, my parents had dreams of

passing down their home to me, so that we might build inheritance. In the end, their dreams, and the amount of work they put in to accomplish them, simply didn't matter." The Smith family home was at 222 N. Cook St.

The Albina District is in the north/northeast quadrant of Portland and historically recognized as Black Portland. Black Portlanders began concentrating in this area as the city's racist real estate and land-use practices and policies geographically confined housing options to that area.

Prior to the destruction, Black residents resided in the Albina community for economic, spiritual, social and civic growth. They built lives and worked there; raised their children; paid taxes; purchased and maintained homes; built community; safeguarded the area; and so much more. They were the stewards of the neighborhood, and because of their investments, Albina has blossomed into the economic powerhouse that it is today.

"My grandparents were forced out of their home, and it was heartbreaking to see," said Claude Bowles, a plaintiff from the lawsuit. "Through this lawsuit, we're asking for fair restitution for the economic opportunity and noneconomic harm done to this community." The Bowles family home was at 223 N. Cook St.

A team of civil rights lawyers including Albies, Stark & Guerriero, LLC, Oregon Law Center and Legal Aid Services of Oregon, filed the lawsuit in the Oregon U.S. District Court in Portland alleging the city of Portland, Prosper Portland and Legacy Emanuel Hospital and Health Center conspired to violate civil rights under the Civil Rights Act, along with other claims of unjust enrichment and public nuisance.

Emanuel Displaced Persons Association 2 (EDPA2) is a grassroots community organization made up of survivors and descendants of those whose homes were taken and demolished in Central Albina.

"My great grandma owned a boarding home that helped the Black community. I'm devastated that her work didn't get passed down," said LaKeesha Dumas, a plaintiff from the lawsuit. "There was a racist conspiracy to violate our civil rights. It's my turn to get in the fight and advocate for our family." The Denson/Dumas family home and business was at 3316 N. Gantenbein Ave.

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