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***New York State Division of Human Rights
Takes Action Against Developers of Exclusive
Student Housing Complex for Possible
Discrimination Against Families and Minority
Residents in the Buffalo Region***

Commissioner Kumiki Gibson today announced that the New York State Division of Human Rights -- the State agency charged with enforcing the State's anti-discrimination law -- has served subpoenas against a large Buffalo-area real estate company and other involved entities, including Villa Maria College, regarding the planned conversion of a large residential complex into an exclusive, gated student community.

The development, known as "Collegiate Crossings," involves the removal of hundreds of current residents from Kensington Village, many of whom are moderate-income families and minority tenants, to make way for an upscale facility designed to serve a predominantly young, single, majority white student population in the Buffalo and Cheektowaga regions. And, once developed, it will be enclosed by a secured, eight-foot fence, separating it from the community.

"Segregation continues to be a real problem across the State, including in the Buffalo region, and developments like these, which exclude groups, perpetuate and exacerbate the problem. All New Yorkers -- including families and people of color -- are entitled to access to fair and integrated housing to the fullest extent of the law, and we plan on ensuring that they get it."

For the past two months, the Division has been negotiating with the owner of Kensington Village and the developer of the new complex -- Chason Affinity Companies -- to ensure that the new development comports with the New York State Human Rights Law and does not disproportionately impact the availability of fair housing for families and communities of color in the region. But, Chason has failed to agree to any necessary changes, is continuing its planned removal of hundreds of tenants, and recently began demolishing the buildings in question, prompting the Division to take official action.

"We are sympathetic to the desire to provide a range of housing opportunities for students in the Buffalo region," Gibson said. "But to do so by removing families and minority residents from their homes, excluding them from housing opportunities, and exacerbating separation and inequality among New Yorkers is not only unnecessary, but runs counter to the Law and to the 'One New York' that Governor Spitzer promised and that the people of New York want and deserve."

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New York has the proud distinction of being the first state in the nation to enact a Human Rights Law, which affords every citizen "an equal opportunity to enjoy a full and productive life." The New York State Division of Human Rights was created to enforce this important law and does so through, among other things, the vigorous prosecution of unlawful discriminatory practices and the receipt, investigation, and resolution of complaints of discrimination. Please visit the Division's website at www.dhr.state.ny.us for additional information about the agency and its work.