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NAACP

Legal Defense and Educational Fund

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR RELEASE

Monday

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FIRST COMPLAINT FILED UNDER TITLE 6 OF CIVIL RIGHTS ACT

Twelve Southern Hospitals Challenged

WASHINGTON--Announcement of the first complaint under Title VI of the new Civil Rights Act, against 12 hospitals in seven southern states was made here today.

In a joint action, the NAACP and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund listed the racial discriminatory hospitals, six of which are in Arkansas, in a letter to Anthony J. Celebrezze, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare.

An immediate investigation has been requested.

Jack Greenberg, director-counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and J. Francis Pohlhaus, counsel for the NAACP Washington Bureau, brought the complaint.

The hospitals in question all receive federal funds for public assistance or hospital construction programs, all administered by HEW.

"This discrimination," Messers Greenberg and Pohlhaus say "takes the form of segregation of Negro patients and staff members from white patients and staff members in rooms, wards, restrooms, waiting rooms, cafeterias and other facilities...."

Some of the hospitals segregate new born babies.

Negroes are often given inferior facilities and in some cases, there have been attempts by hospital personnel to dissuade Negroes from requesting or using desegregated facilities.

"We are informed," Messers Greenberg and Pohlhaus add, "that in some cases these practices continue despite the assurance of non-discrimination given by the hospitals in question to agencies of the Department of HEW."

Under Title VI, HEW is expected to take affirmative measures to end racial discrimination in southern hospitals.

However, if the hospitals refuse to comply, Title VI authorizes "the termination of federal financial assistance".

Michael Meltsner, Legal Defense Fund assistant counsel indicated that one of the hospitals, the King's Daughters Hospital in Canton, Mississippi, had refused to permit a Negro to visit a white patient.

At the Huntsville Memorial Hospital in Huntsville, Texas, all Negro patients, male and female, must share a single washroom. When the Negro section of the hospital is full, additional Negro patients are placed in the halls, even if there are empty beds in the white section.

(more)

(52)

The full text of Messrs. Greenberg and Pohlhaus' letter:

The Honorable Anthony J. Celebrezze
Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
Washington, D. C.

Sir:

We have received complaints from a number of persons who believe themselves, and Negroes as a class, subject to racial discrimination at hospitals receiving funds from the federal government under public assistance or hospital construction programs administered by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. This discrimination takes the form of segregation of Negro patients and staff members from white patients and staff members in rooms, wards, restrooms, waiting rooms, cafeterias, and other facilities, provision of inferior facilities for Negroes using hospital services, and attempts by hospital personnel to dissuade Negroes from requesting or using desegregated facilities. We are informed that in some cases these practices continue despite the assurance of nondiscrimination given by the hospitals in question to agencies of the Department.

We request, therefore, that appropriate action be taken to ensure immediate compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Departmental regulations on the part of the following hospitals:

Columbus County Hospital--Whiteville, North Carolina
Dixie Hospital--Hampton, Virginia
Huntsville Memorial Hospital--Huntsville, Texas
Jefferson County Hospital--Pine Bluff, Arkansas
Flagler Hospital--St. Augustine, Florida
Hempstead Memorial Hospital--Hope, Arkansas
City-County Hospital--Hope, Arkansas
Crittenden Memorial Hospital--West Memphis, Arkansas
Chickasawba Hospital--Blythville, Arkansas
Mississippi County Hospital--Blythville, Arkansas
King's Daughters Hospital--Canton, Mississippi
Baton Rouge General Hospital--Baton Rouge, Louisiana

As we represent individuals subject to discrimination, we desire to receive notice of such action as is taken pursuant to this request as well as the opportunity to participate in hearings and other proceedings held to effect full compliance.

We hope that your Department will take speedy action to end misuse of federal funds by these medical facilities.

Sincerely yours,

Jack Greenberg
Director-Counsel
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational
Fund, Inc.

J. Francis Pohlhaus
Counsel, Washington Bureau
National Association for the Advancement
of Colored People