

JUDGE CLEARS HURDLES IN RACIAL DISCRIMINATION SUIT CHALLENGING COOK COUNTY'S PROPERTY TAX ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

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CHICAGO – In a court [order](#) handed down yesterday, Circuit Judge Celia Gamrath held that three community organizations seeking to challenge Cook County's property tax assessment system have the legal standing they need to bring a racial discrimination lawsuit.

"This order takes us one step closer to ending a property tax system that has overcharged property owners in Black and Hispanic neighborhoods, disproportionately shifting the tax burden on to those communities and away from wealthier, White neighborhoods," said Aneel Chablani of Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights.

The lawsuit filed in 2017 by Brighton Park Neighborhood Council, Logan Square Neighborhood Association, and South Suburban Housing Center alleged that property owners in majority-Hispanic and majority-Black neighborhoods were twice as likely to be over-assessed and therefore over-taxed as majority-White neighborhoods. Cook County Assessor Joe Berrios, who was replaced by voters in the November election, was aware for years that his office's residential valuations were inaccurate and regressive.

The Assessor's Office asked the judge to dismiss the lawsuit, but in yesterday's ruling Judge Gamrath wrote that the organizations had adequately stated their discrimination claim under the Illinois Civil Rights Act.

Judge Gamrath also validated their claim under the federal Fair Housing Act, which alleges that the Assessor's Office's flawed system places a disproportionate burden on Black and Hispanic neighborhoods, impacting the affordability of homeownership, the rental market and the availability of housing. A status hearing for the case is planned for Monday, March 18 at the Daley Center.

"BPNC is thrilled with Judge Gamrath's decision" said Anita Caballero BPNC Board President. For too long, homeowners in Brighton Park, and other low-income communities of color throughout Chicago, have been subsidizing a property tax break for wealthier communities. We look forward to making our case in court and winning the fight for a fair and equitable property tax system for all people in Cook County."

"South Suburban Housing Center is heartened by Judge Gamrath's decision which will allow us to go forward and show that the past practices of the Cook County Assessor's Office, as they pertain to our clients in communities of color, violate civil rights and fair housing law and were anything but honest, transparent, or fair," said John Petruszak, Executive Director of South Suburban Housing Center.

The community organizations are represented by Attorneys Aneel Chablani and Barbara Barreno-Paschall of Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights; Robert Libman, Nancy Maldonado, and Matthew Owens of Miner, Barnhill & Galland; Joshua Karsh, Charlie Wysong, and Matthew Piers of Hughes Socol Piers Resnick & Dym; and Jeffrey Taren of MacDonald, Hoague & Bayless. Their lawsuit asks the court to appoint an independent monitor to oversee the adoption of a fair, accurate, transparent, lawful, and nondiscriminatory tax assessment system.