

# Daily Journal

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## Settlement reached in housing conditions case

*Inner City Law Center, Shernoff Bidart team up to get \$4 million resolution*

By **Katie Lucia**  
Daily Journal Staff Writer

**R**esidents of a rundown apartment complex recently gained a nearly \$4 million settlement with landlords, a result that lawyers say is large for litigation targeting affordable housing conditions.

Attorneys with the Inner City Law Center and Claremont-based Shernoff Bidart Echeverria Bentley LLP, which focuses heavily on insurance litigation, worked together to secure damages for 28 people living in dilapidated housing in Hollywood. The plaintiffs recovered \$680,000 in monetary damages, relocation benefits of \$93,150 and \$3 million for a full renovation of the building.

"In recent years the trend is for landlords and insurance companies to really undervalue these cases — to get them settled for \$10,000 a person," said Ashley Parris, an Inner City senior staff attorney.

"That makes our job more difficult and it takes longer through the litigation process to convince them that the suffering of these tenants is very real and they

should be taking this very seriously," Parris added.

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building failed to meet housing codes for fire safety, pestilence, mold, plumbing, electrical and flooring, Parris said. The property also lacked security, and vagrants and other nontenants

filled the halls and basement.

Shernoff Bidart was one of the first plaintiffs' firms the law center had ever paired with on a housing case. The firm's expertise in bad faith litigation was valuable to the case, Parris said, due to the complexity of the matter and the fact that it involved a number of insurance companies.

Per the settlement, plaintiffs were awarded attorney fees of about \$226,000, of which the entire amount will be donated to Inner City Law Center.

"It was personally gratifying to work on a case representing the least of these," said Gregory L. Bentley, a Shernoff Bidart partner. "Ashley Parris and Inner City Law Center are truly amazing how they constantly fight the fight for the little guy."

Defendants in the case include Vista Cahuenga LLC, Scott Alan Chaplan, Chateau Hollywood LLC, Brett H. Daniels, Statewide Enterprises Inc., Urban Eco Housing LLP and Vista Investment Group LLC. They were represented by Frederic T. Tanner of Nelson Griffin LLP in Los Angeles and Jack H. Snyder of Wolfe & Wyman LLP in Irvine. Tanner and Snyder couldn't be reached at press time Thursday.

The settlement is set for final court approval in July.

The case is *Villegas v. Vista Cahuegna LLC*, BC462833 (L.A. Super. Ct., filed June 2, 2011).

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