

LANDLORD-TENANT LAW---PUBLIC HOUSING TENANTS SEEK \$24 MILLION  
IN DAMAGES

Stella Wright Tenants' Assn. v. HUD  
(United States District Court,  
District of New Jersey, Civil Action  
No. 948-71, Complaint filed  
June 25, 1971) by Gerard Clark and  
Harris David, Newark-Essex Joint  
Law Reform Project.

This is the latest in a series of suits involving tenants in the Stella Wright Homes, a public housing project in the Central Ward of Newark [see also Newark Housing Authority v. Henry, 32 State Clearing House Report 11 (July, 1971)]. A major charge of the suit is that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is an "absentee landlord" and is responsible for the allegedly uninhabitable conditions in the project. As indications of this alleged nonhabitability, the tenants point to the alleged "prison-like" architectural design of the buildings, the inoperability of the elevators, the lack of proper lighting in common areas, the absence of security guards, the presence of rodents and roaches, the lack of adequate maintenance of the buildings, and severe overcrowding.

The tenants also contend that HUD and the Newark Housing Authority have discriminated against black persons by building allegedly inferior projects in ghetto areas and by concentrating black tenants in those projects. To document this allegation, the tenants compare Stella Wright Homes, where approximately three out of some 4780 residents are white, with the Stephen Crane Homes, another Newark public housing project, where more than 85 percent of the residents are white. According to the tenants, the Stephen Crane project is composed of two-story buildings built in the midst of a park in the predominantly white North Ward; the Stella Wright project is composed of 13-story buildings in an area of the city which has been demolished by an urban renewal program and allegedly resembles "a bombed-out city." The density at Stephen Crane is 95 persons per acre, and at Stella Wright, 353 persons per acre.

Finally, the tenants contend that they have been denied their statutory and constitutional right to participate actively in the management of the Stella Wright Homes.

The tenants seek \$24 million in damages and an injunction directing the defendants to remedy the alleged uninhabitable conditions, to permit the tenants to participate in decision-making, and to eradicate all vestiges of racial discrimination. The tenants also ask that the Newark Housing Authority be placed under receivership.

Complaint.

