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Justice Dept. settles bias suit against Metro

By Bill Theobald

TENNESSEAN WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Justice Department has settled a discrimination lawsuit filed against Metro Nashville government for blocking a substance abuse treatment program from locating in the satellite city of Goodlettsville.

The settlement, announced Thursday, requires Metro to rescind a change in its zoning laws that prevented Teen Challenge, a Christian treatment program, from using the property. The city also must pay a \$20,000 fine, pay \$50,000 to participants in the program, and train about 100 employees who make zoning and land-use decisions on the requirements of federal anti-discrimination laws.

"We feel like the decree finally puts in place protections that will ensure this type of civil right violations do not take place again," said Larry Crain, attorney for Teen Challenge. The settlement still must be approved by the federal court.

"We are pleased to be able to reach an agreement with the Department of Justice and are hopeful the court will approve it," said Sue Cain, Metro law director.

The lawsuit, filed in October in U.S. District Court in Nashville, had sought a civil penalty from Metro and asked that the city be made to pay damages to every person who would have been housed by Teen Challenge.

Under the Fair Housing Act, the program's participants are considered disabled because of their addiction to drugs or alcohol.