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PRESS RELEASE

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Rentberry and Seattle landlord file suit over Seattle ban on rent bidding websites

Seattle, WA – May 23, 2018 – Rentberry, an online rental bidding site, and a Seattle landlord are named as plaintiffs in a lawsuit filed today by Pacific Legal Foundation which seeks to uphold the plaintiffs' First Amendment rights to freedom of speech under the US Constitution.

The lawsuit argues that the City is violating those constitutional rights by enforcing a ban on rental bidding websites that facilitate communication between landlords and renters in the City of Seattle. It asks for a preliminary injunction to restrain the City from enforcing the ordinance in the short term.

The ordinance, passed unanimously by Seattle City Council in March of this year, was cited as necessary for the city to get ahead of an emerging technology with Councilmembers citing Uber and Airbnb as disrupting markets without being regulated. The ordinance also claimed that rent bidding sites may conflict with the City's "first in time" rental ordinance – that ordinance has since been overturned by courts after being challenged successfully by Pacific Legal Foundation on four separate constitutional issues.

"Rent bidding sites offer renters and landlords to settle on mutually agreeable terms, terms which could greatly benefit the renter such as negotiating lower rent or deposit. The mom and pop landlords that are RHAWA's members know the value of a great renter. It's unfortunate that Seattle City Council chose to view rent bidding sites as a threat rather than an opportunity for renters to negotiate with landlords," said RHAWA Board President William Shadbolt. "Blocking innovation is not a progressive solution."

Delaney Wysingle, the named landlord plaintiff, sites Rentberry's platform as a way "to easily communicate with his tenants...to facilitate easier communication with both existing and prospective tenants." Mr. Wysingle notes that he had expected to be able to advertise a rental vacancy this summer to save time and settle on a mutually beneficial arrangement with a renter, and that the ordinance has unconstitutionally deprived him of the ability to do so.

About Rental Housing Association of Washington

RHAWA is the State's largest association of rental property owners, managers, and investors representing over 5,400 rental housing owners statewide, with over 4,000 owning units in the City of Seattle. Of those Seattle owners, 90% own less than 10 rental units. A not-for-profit organization, its mission is to advance the general welfare of the rental housing industry and provide its members with a full range of products and services including tenant screening, leasing forms, and education.

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