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Sent via email, Portable Document Format, to thomas.gibbons@toledo.oh.gov
and matthew.lascheid@toledo.oh.gov.

Ken Fallows, Chair
Thomas C. Gibbons, Director
Matthew Lascheid, City Planner
City of Toledo Plan Commission
One Government Center, Ste. #1620
Toledo, OH 43604

May 6, 2022

Re: Group Living Text Amendment, M-5-21

Dear City of Toledo Plan Commissioners:

We write to comment on the proposed text amendment to Group Living, REF: M-5-21. It is our understanding that this text amendment is currently set to appear before the Commission on May 12, 2022. We have asked the Plan Commission Staff to please provide this letter to you in advance of the hearing and to please include it in the packet for this matter.

Collectively, The Fair Housing Center, The Ability Center of Greater Toledo, the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board of Lucas County, and Advocates for Basic Legal Equality brought this issue to the attention of the Plan Commission and have now conversed with the Plan Commission staff for well over a year about the need for a text amendment regarding group living. Both state and federal law—as well as the issues and concerns outlined in the Plan Commission staff's present and past reports—compel these changes to the code.

We wish to thank the Plan Commission staff, including Mr. Gibbons and Mr. Lascheid, who worked long and hard on this. They have been responsive to our requests for meetings and have listened to our feedback.

In short, we ask that the Commission please move forward with these much-needed changes as soon as possible, while also making a few improvements to ensure conformity with state and federal law.

We ask that the Commission adopt the version of the text amendment we enclose here, which displays the redlined changes we suggest.

Please allow us to explain these proposed improvements as provided in the redlined enclosure.

1. Toledo cannot limit the locations of group homes to major streets. But the text amendment confines certain group homes only to major streets.

Ohio law preemptively mandates that any person may operate a group home licensed by Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (ODMHAS) or the Ohio Department of Developmental Disability (DODD) in most residential zones. See R.C. 5119.341 (preemptively mandating that zoning authorities must

permit group homes licensed by ODMHAS); R.C. 5123.19 (providing the same mandate for group homes licensed by DODD). The zones where state law preemptively allows them to operate are determined by the size of the facility. *Id.*

While state law provides a few exceptions to this rule—such as architectural design conformity with the character of the neighborhood—it does not provide discretion to limit the locations of group homes to only major streets. *Id.*

Put simply, state law demands that Toledo allow group homes in most residential zones, and it cannot change this mandate to demand they appear only on major streets. *Id.* The text amendment as currently proposed requires that group homes licensed by ODMHAS appear only on major streets. Therefore, we ask that the major street requirement be removed consistent with the redlined edits we provide.

2. Toledo’s authority to enforce spacing restrictions on group homes is limited. But the text amendment provides for expansive spacing limitations beyond those allowed by state law.

Although licensed group homes must be permitted as of right in certain residential zones, state law allows the local zoning authority to enact rules to “limit the excessive concentration” of certain group homes. R.C. 5123.19(N)(3) and R.C. 5119.341(D). But its authority to enact such rules is limited as follows.

For group homes licensed by DODD, the authority to enact local rules to “limit excessive concentration of these residential facilities” pertains only to large facilities with nine to sixteen residents. R.C. 5123.19(N)(3). Furthermore, this exception is designed to limit the excessive concentration of “*these residential facilities*,” as opposed to just any kind of facility that a local authority believes should not be nearby. *Id.*

For group homes licensed by ODMHAS, the authority to enact local rules to “limit the excessive concentration of licensed residential facilities” applies to both large and small facilities. R.C. 5119.341(D). However, the local rules may only limit the concentration of facilities licensed by ODMHAS, as opposed to any kind of facility that a local authority believes the group homes should be separated from. *Id.*

Although state law clearly limits the capacity of local zoning authorities to control the “excessive concentration” of licensed group homes, the proposed text amendment provides expansive spacing restrictions. The code would measure the distance between group homes and a wide range of other types of facilities including day cares. The spacing restrictions do not aim to deconcentrate certain types of group homes, they prohibit the development of such facilities in a wide range of situations unrelated to any goal of de-concentration.

The redlined edits we provide would conform the spacing restrictions to the state law.

3. The Fair Housing Amendments Act also prohibits Toledo from creating barriers to the development of group homes.

The Fair Housing Amendments Act applies to zoning laws and restrictions, including those imposed on group homes. For a review and guidance on the law, please see U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and U.S. Department of Justice, State and Local Land Use Laws and Practices and the Application of the Fair Housing Act, November 10, 2016, available

at <https://www.justice.gov/opa/file/912366/download>. A copy of the guidance (hereafter “HUD-DOJ guidance”) is also enclosed.

As provided in the HUD-DOJ guidance, one of the primary examples of violations of the Fair Housing Act in zoning is:

“Imposing restrictions or additional conditions on group housing for persons with disabilities that are not imposed on families or other groups of unrelated individuals, by, for example, requiring an occupancy permit for persons with disabilities to live in a single-family home while not requiring a permit for other residents of single-family homes.”

Id at 3. *See also Larkin v. State of Mich. Dep't of Soc. Servs.*, 89 F.3d 285 (6th Cir. 1996) (imposing this same rule in the Sixth Circuit).

Obviously, the zoning code, as currently written, imposes restrictions on the development of group homes, beyond those required for other facilities. The text amendment as the staff has proposed it would improve things. But it would still create barriers to the development of group homes, even in ways that conflict with state law.

4. The definition of Halfway House should be updated to utilize more current and inclusive language.

The current definition of Halfway House refers to housing for “adult offenders,” and while this may be consistent with state law, part of the larger purpose of these amendments is to adopt more inclusive language with respect to housing for underserved populations. As such, referring to a Halfway House as housing for “adults returning from incarceration, on parole, or with a criminal history” is suggested as language that is more current, inclusive, and consistent with reentry advocacy.

Therefore, the Plan Commission should adopt the redlined edits as enclosed.

While we are supportive of moving forward with this proposal, we should also note that, throughout this process, other concerns arose regarding the strict regulations on group rentals. We look forward to working with Plan Commission staff in the future to review this issue as well.

If you have any questions, we would be happy to discuss further. You may reach George Thomas at The Fair Housing Center to schedule a discussion at 419-243-6163, ext. 115, or gthomas@toledofhc.org.

Sincerely,

/s/ George Thomas, The Fair Housing Center

/s/ Sarah Jenkins, The Fair Housing Center

/s/ Katherine Hunt-Thomas, The Ability Center of Greater Toledo

/s/ Scott Sylak, the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board of Lucas County

/s/ David Manor, Advocates for Basic Legal Equality

Use Category	RS 12	RS 9	RS 6	RD 6	RM (all)	R MH	CN	CO	CM	CS	CR	CD	IL	IG	IP	POS	IC
Residential																	
Household Living																	
Detached House	P	P	P	P	P	-	P	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Detached House, Zero Lot Line	-	-	P [1]	P [1]	P [1]	-	P [1]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Attached House	-	-	-	P [2]	P [2]	-	P [2]	-	P [2]	-	-	P [2]	-	-	-	-	-
Duplex	-	-	-	P	P	-	P	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cluster Housing	S [3]	S [3]	S [3]	S [3]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Manufactured Housing Park	-	-	-	-	-	P [4]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Manufactured Home	-	-	-	-	-	P	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multi-Dwelling Structure	-	-	-	-	P [5]	-	P [5,6]	P [5,6]	P [5,7]	P [5,6]	P [5,6]	P [5]	-	-	-	-	P
Adult Foster Home	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Certified Foster Home	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	-	-	-	-	P
Group Living																	
Group Home, Small	P [8]	P [8]	P [8]	P [8]	P [8]	-	P [6,8]	-	P [8]	-	P [6,8]	-	-	-	-	-	-
Group Home, Large	-	-	-	-	P [8]	-	P [6,8,9]	-	P [8,9]	-	P [6,8]	P [6,8]	-	-	-	-	-
Halfway House	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	S [8, 27]	-	S [8, 27]	S [8, 27]	-	-	-	-	-
Nursing Home	-	S [9]	S [9]	S [9]	S [9]	-	P [9]	-	P [9]	P [9]	P [9]	P [9]	-	-	-	-	-
Group Rental	P [9,10]	P [9,10]	P [9,10]	P [9,10]	P [9,10]	-	P [10]	-	P [10]	P [10]	P [10]	P [10]	-	-	-	-	-
Homeless Shelter	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	S [8]	S [8]	S [8]	S [8]	-	-	-	-	-

[6] Dwelling units must be located above ground floor

[8] Spacing

[9] Major Street

The rows of the Use Categories table titled “Residential Drug and Alcohol Treatment Center” and “All other Medical Services” is removed entirely. The row of the Use Categories table titled “Medical Services” is amended to read as follows:

	RS 12	RS 9	RS 6	RD6	RM	RMH	CN	CO	CM	CS	CR	CD	IL	IG	IP	POS	IC
Medical Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	P [13]	P	P	P	P	P	-	-	-	-	P

Existing Code Section

SECTION #. Current Toledo Municipal Code Section 1116.0231 which reads as follows is hereby repealed:

Personal health services including prevention, diagnosis and treatment, rehabilitation services provided by physicians, dentists, nurses, and other health personnel and medical testing and analysis services. Typical uses include medical offices, dental laboratories, and health maintenance organizations.

A. **Drug and Alcohol Treatment Center, Non-residential.** A facility providing alcohol and drug addiction services, including but not limited to methadone treatment, to one or more persons who do not reside at the center.

B. **Exceptions.** Use types more specifically classified, such as Hospitals.

Proposed Code Section

SECTION #. Toledo Municipal Code Section 1116.0231 is hereby enacted to read as follows:

1116.0231 Medical Services.

Personal health services including prevention, diagnosis and treatment, rehabilitation services provided by physicians, dentists, nurses, and other health personnel and medical testing and analysis services. Typical uses include medical offices, dental laboratories, and health maintenance organizations.

B. **Exceptions.** Use types more specifically classified, such as Hospitals.

1116.0231 – Remove “Non-residential Drug and Alcohol Treatment Center” description – this distinction makes no sense since there is no “residential” Drug and Alcohol Treatment Center. It also distinguishes facilities based on disability. This would remove the distinction.

proposed facility is not located on a major street as required, a facility may request approval through the Special Use Permit process.



Ohio Revised Code

Section 5119.341 Operations as permitted use.

Effective: September 29, 2015

Legislation: House Bill 64 - 131st General Assembly

(A) Any person may operate a residential facility providing accommodations and personal care services for one to five unrelated persons and licensed as a residential facility that meets the criteria specified in division (B)(1)(b) of section 5119.34 of the Revised Code as a permitted use in any residential district or zone, including any single-family residential district or zone of any political subdivision. Such facilities may be required to comply with area, height, yard, and architectural compatibility requirements that are uniformly imposed upon all single-family residences within the district or zone.

(B) Any person may operate a residential facility providing accommodations and personal care services for six to sixteen persons and licensed as a residential facility that meets the criteria specified in division (B)(1)(b) of section 5119.34 of the Revised Code as a permitted use in any multiple-family residential district or zone of any political subdivision, except that a political subdivision that has enacted a zoning ordinance or resolution establishing planned-unit developments as defined in section 519.021 of the Revised Code may exclude such facilities from such districts, and a political subdivision that has enacted a zoning ordinance or resolution may regulate such facilities in multiple-family residential districts or zones as a conditionally permitted use or special exception, in either case, under reasonable and specific standards and conditions set out in the zoning ordinance or resolution to:

(1) Require the architectural design and site layout of the home and the location, nature, and height of any walls, screens, and fences to be compatible with adjoining land uses and the residential character of the neighborhood;

(2) Require compliance with yard, parking, and sign regulation.

(C) Divisions (A) and (B) of this section do not affect any right of a political subdivision to permit a person to operate a residential facility licensed under section 5119.34 of the Revised Code in a single-family residential district or zone under conditions established by the political subdivision.



(D)(1) Notwithstanding divisions (A) and (B) of this section and except as provided in division (D)(2) of this section, a political subdivision that has enacted a zoning ordinance or resolution may limit the excessive concentration of licensed residential facilities that meet the criteria specified in division (B)(1)(b) of section 5119.34 of the Revised Code.

(2) Division (D)(1) of this section does not authorize a political subdivision to prevent or limit the continued existence and operation of residential facilities existing and operating on September 10, 2012, and that meet the criteria specified in division (B)(1)(b) of section 5119.34 of the Revised Code. A political subdivision may consider the existence of such facilities for the purpose of limiting the excessive concentration of such facilities that meet the criteria specified in division (B)(1)(b) of section 5119.34 of the Revised Code that are not existing and operating on September 10, 2012.



Ohio Revised Code

Section 5123.19 Operation of residential facilities.

Effective: September 30, 2021

Legislation: House Bill 110

(A) As used in sections 5123.19 to 5123.20 of the Revised Code:

- (1) "Independent living arrangement" means an arrangement in which an individual with a developmental disability resides in an individualized setting chosen by the individual or the individual's guardian, which is not dedicated principally to the provision of residential services for individuals with developmental disabilities, and for which no financial support is received for rendering such service from any governmental agency by a provider of residential services.
- (2) "Licensee" means the person or government agency that has applied for a license to operate a residential facility and to which the license was issued under this section.
- (3) "Political subdivision" means a municipal corporation, county, or township.
- (4) "Related party" has the same meaning as in section 5123.16 of the Revised Code except that "provider" as used in the definition of "related party" means a person or government entity that held or applied for a license to operate a residential facility, rather than a person or government entity certified to provide supported living.
- (5)(a) Except as provided in division (A)(5)(b) of this section, "residential facility" means a home or facility, including an ICF/IID, in which an individual with a developmental disability resides.
- (b) "Residential facility" does not mean any of the following:
 - (i) The home of a relative or legal guardian in which an individual with a developmental disability resides;
 - (ii) A respite care home certified under section 5126.05 of the Revised Code;



- (iii) A county home or district home operated pursuant to Chapter 5155. of the Revised Code;
 - (iv) A dwelling in which the only residents with developmental disabilities are in independent living arrangements or are being provided supported living.
- (B) Every person or government agency desiring to operate a residential facility shall apply for licensure of the facility to the director of developmental disabilities unless the residential facility is subject to section 3721.02, 5103.03, 5119.33, or division (B)(1)(b) of section 5119.34 of the Revised Code.
- (C)(1) Subject to section 5123.196 of the Revised Code, the director of developmental disabilities shall license the operation of residential facilities. An initial license shall be issued for a period that does not exceed one year, unless the director denies the license under division (D) of this section. A license shall be renewed for a period that does not exceed three years, unless the director refuses to renew the license under division (D) of this section. The director, when issuing or renewing a license, shall specify the period for which the license is being issued or renewed. A license remains valid for the length of the licensing period specified by the director, unless the license is terminated, revoked, or voluntarily surrendered.
- (2) Notwithstanding sections 5123.043, 5123.196, and 5123.197 of the Revised Code and rules adopted under section 5123.04 of the Revised Code, the director shall issue a new license for a residential facility if the facility meets the following conditions:
- (a) The residential facility will be certified as an ICF/IID;
 - (b) The building in which the residential facility will be operated was operated as a residential facility under a lease for not fewer than twenty years before the date of application for a new license;
 - (c) The former operator of the residential facility relocated the beds previously in the facility to another site that will be licensed as a residential facility;
 - (d) The residential facility will be located in Preble, Clermont, or Warren county;



(e) The residential facility will contain eight beds;

(f) The licensee will make a good faith effort to serve multi-system youth or adults with severe behavioral challenges at the residential facility or at one or more other residential facilities for which licenses are issued under division (C) of this section.

(3) The director shall issue not more than five licenses under division (C)(2) of this section.

(D) If it is determined that an applicant or licensee is not in compliance with a provision of this chapter that applies to residential facilities or the rules adopted under such a provision, the director may deny issuance of a license, refuse to renew a license, terminate a license, revoke a license, issue an order for the suspension of admissions to a facility, issue an order for the placement of a monitor at a facility, issue an order for the immediate removal of residents, or take any other action the director considers necessary consistent with the director's authority under this chapter regarding residential facilities. In the director's selection and administration of the sanction to be imposed, all of the following apply:

(1) The director may deny, refuse to renew, or revoke a license, if the director determines that the applicant or licensee has demonstrated a pattern of serious noncompliance or that a violation creates a substantial risk to the health and safety of residents of a residential facility.

(2) The director may terminate a license if more than twelve consecutive months have elapsed since the residential facility was last occupied by a resident or a notice required by division (J) of this section is not given.

(3) The director may issue an order for the suspension of admissions to a facility for any violation that may result in sanctions under division (D)(1) of this section and for any other violation specified in rules adopted under division (G)(2) of this section. If the suspension of admissions is imposed for a violation that may result in sanctions under division (D)(1) of this section, the director may impose the suspension before providing an opportunity for an adjudication under Chapter 119. of the Revised Code. The director shall lift an order for the suspension of admissions when the director determines that the violation that formed the basis for the order has been corrected.



(4) The director may order the placement of a monitor at a residential facility for any violation specified in rules adopted under division (G)(2) of this section. The director shall lift the order when the director determines that the violation that formed the basis for the order has been corrected.

(5) When the director initiates license revocation proceedings, no opportunity for submitting a plan of correction shall be given. The director shall notify the licensee by letter of the initiation of the proceedings. The letter shall list the deficiencies of the residential facility and inform the licensee that no plan of correction will be accepted. The director shall also send a copy of the letter to the county board of developmental disabilities. Except in the case of a licensee that is an ICF/IID, the county board shall send a copy of the letter to each of the following:

- (a) Each resident who receives services from the licensee;
- (b) The guardian of each resident who receives services from the licensee if the resident has a guardian;
- (c) The parent or guardian of each resident who receives services from the licensee if the resident is a minor.

(6) Pursuant to rules which shall be adopted in accordance with Chapter 119. of the Revised Code, the director may order the immediate removal of residents from a residential facility whenever conditions at the facility present an immediate danger of physical or psychological harm to the residents.

(7) In determining whether a residential facility is being operated in compliance with a provision of this chapter that applies to residential facilities or the rules adopted under such a provision, or whether conditions at a residential facility present an immediate danger of physical or psychological harm to the residents, the director may rely on information obtained by a county board of developmental disabilities or other governmental agencies.

(8) In proceedings initiated to deny, refuse to renew, or revoke licenses, the director may deny, refuse to renew, or revoke a license regardless of whether some or all of the deficiencies that



prompted the proceedings have been corrected at the time of the hearing.

(E)(1) Except as provided in division (E)(2) of this section, appeals from proceedings initiated to impose a sanction under division (D) of this section shall be conducted in accordance with Chapter 119. of the Revised Code.

(2) Appeals from proceedings initiated to order the suspension of admissions to a facility shall be conducted in accordance with Chapter 119. of the Revised Code, unless the order was issued before providing an opportunity for an adjudication, in which case all of the following apply:

(a) The licensee may request a hearing not later than ten days after receiving the notice specified in section 119.07 of the Revised Code.

(b) If a timely request for a hearing that includes the licensee's current address is made, the hearing shall commence not later than thirty days after the department receives the request.

(c) After commencing, the hearing shall continue uninterrupted, except for Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays, unless other interruptions are agreed to by the licensee and the director.

(d) If the hearing is conducted by a hearing examiner, the hearing examiner shall file a report and recommendations not later than ten days after the last of the following:

(i) The close of the hearing;

(ii) If a transcript of the proceedings is ordered, the hearing examiner receives the transcript;

(iii) If post-hearing briefs are timely filed, the hearing examiner receives the briefs.

(e) A copy of the written report and recommendation of the hearing examiner shall be sent, by certified mail, to the licensee and the licensee's attorney, if applicable, not later than five days after the report is filed.

(f) Not later than five days after the hearing examiner files the report and recommendations, the



licensee may file objections to the report and recommendations.

(g) Not later than fifteen days after the hearing examiner files the report and recommendations, the director shall issue an order approving, modifying, or disapproving the report and recommendations.

(h) Notwithstanding the pendency of the hearing, the director shall lift the order for the suspension of admissions when the director determines that the violation that formed the basis for the order has been corrected.

(F) Neither a person or government agency whose application for a license to operate a residential facility is denied nor a related party of the person or government agency may apply for a license to operate a residential facility before the date that is five years after the date of the denial. Neither a licensee whose residential facility license is revoked nor a related party of the licensee may apply for a residential facility license before the date that is five years after the date of the revocation.

(G) In accordance with Chapter 119. of the Revised Code, the director shall adopt and may amend and rescind rules for licensing and regulating the operation of residential facilities. The rules for residential facilities that are ICFs/IID may differ from those for other residential facilities. The rules shall establish and specify the following:

(1) Procedures and criteria for issuing and renewing licenses, including procedures and criteria for determining the length of the licensing period that the director must specify for each license when it is issued or renewed;

(2) Procedures and criteria for denying, refusing to renew, terminating, and revoking licenses and for ordering the suspension of admissions to a facility, placement of a monitor at a facility, and the immediate removal of residents from a facility;

(3) Fees for issuing and renewing licenses, which shall be deposited into the program fee fund created under section 5123.033 of the Revised Code;

(4) Procedures for surveying residential facilities;



- (5) Classifications for the various types of residential facilities;
 - (6) The maximum number of individuals who may be served in a particular type of residential facility;
 - (7) Uniform procedures for admission of individuals to and transfers and discharges of individuals from residential facilities;
 - (8) Other standards for the operation of residential facilities and the services provided at residential facilities;
 - (9) Procedures for waiving any provision of any rule adopted under this section.
- (H)(1) Before issuing a license, the director shall conduct a survey of the residential facility for which application is made. The director shall conduct a survey of each licensed residential facility at least once during the period the license is valid and may conduct additional inspections as needed. A survey includes but is not limited to an on-site examination and evaluation of the residential facility, its personnel, and the services provided there. The director may assign to a county board of developmental disabilities or the department of health the responsibility to conduct any survey or inspection under this section.
- (2) In conducting surveys, the director shall be given access to the residential facility; all records, accounts, and any other documents related to the operation of the facility; the licensee; the residents of the facility; and all persons acting on behalf of, under the control of, or in connection with the licensee. The licensee and all persons on behalf of, under the control of, or in connection with the licensee shall cooperate with the director in conducting the survey.
 - (3) Following each survey, the director shall provide the licensee with a report listing the date of the survey, any citations issued as a result of the survey, and the statutes or rules that purportedly have been violated and are the bases of the citations. The director shall also do both of the following:
 - (a) Specify a date by which the licensee may appeal any of the citations;



(b) When appropriate, specify a timetable within which the licensee must submit a plan of correction describing how the problems specified in the citations will be corrected and, the date by which the licensee anticipates the problems will be corrected.

(4) If the director initiates a proceeding to revoke a license, the director shall include the report required by division (H)(3) of this section with the notice of the proposed revocation the director sends to the licensee. In this circumstance, the licensee may not submit a plan of correction.

(5) After a plan of correction is submitted, the director shall approve or disapprove the plan. If the plan of correction is approved, a copy of the approved plan shall be provided, not later than five business days after it is approved, to any person or government entity who requests it and made available on the internet web site maintained by the department of developmental disabilities. If the plan of correction is not approved and the director initiates a proceeding to revoke the license, a copy of the survey report shall be provided to any person or government entity that requests it and shall be made available on the internet web site maintained by the department.

(6) The director shall initiate disciplinary action against any department employee who notifies or causes the notification to any unauthorized person of an unannounced survey of a residential facility by an authorized representative of the department.

(I) In addition to any other information which may be required of applicants for a license pursuant to this section, the director shall require each applicant to provide a copy of an approved plan for a proposed residential facility pursuant to section 5123.042 of the Revised Code. This division does not apply to renewal of a license or to an applicant for an initial or modified license who meets the requirements of section 5123.197 of the Revised Code.

(J)(1) A licensee shall notify the owner of the building in which the licensee's residential facility is located of any significant change in the identity of the licensee or management contractor before the effective date of the change if the licensee is not the owner of the building.

(2) Pursuant to rules, which shall be adopted in accordance with Chapter 119. of the Revised Code, the director may require notification to the department of any significant change in the ownership of a residential facility or in the identity of the licensee or management contractor. If the director



determines that a significant change of ownership is proposed, the director shall consider the proposed change to be an application for development by a new operator pursuant to section 5123.042 of the Revised Code and shall advise the applicant within sixty days of the notification that the current license shall continue in effect or a new license will be required pursuant to this section. If the director requires a new license, the director shall permit the facility to continue to operate under the current license until the new license is issued, unless the current license is revoked, refused to be renewed, or terminated in accordance with Chapter 119. of the Revised Code.

(3) A licensee shall transfer to the new licensee or management contractor all records related to the residents of the facility following any significant change in the identity of the licensee or management contractor.

(K) A county board of developmental disabilities and any interested person may file complaints alleging violations of statute or department rule relating to residential facilities with the department. All complaints shall state the facts constituting the basis of the allegation. The department shall not reveal the source of any complaint unless the complainant agrees in writing to waive the right to confidentiality or until so ordered by a court of competent jurisdiction.

The department shall adopt rules in accordance with Chapter 119. of the Revised Code establishing procedures for the receipt, referral, investigation, and disposition of complaints filed with the department under this division.

(L) Before issuing a license under this section to a residential facility that will accommodate at any time more than one individual with a developmental disability, the director shall, by first class mail, notify the following:

(1) If the facility will be located in a municipal corporation, the clerk of the legislative authority of the municipal corporation;

(2) If the facility will be located in unincorporated territory, the clerk of the appropriate board of county commissioners and the fiscal officer of the appropriate board of township trustees.

The director shall not issue the license for ten days after mailing the notice, excluding Saturdays,



Sundays, and legal holidays, in order to give the notified local officials time in which to comment on the proposed issuance.

Any legislative authority of a municipal corporation, board of county commissioners, or board of township trustees that receives notice under this division of the proposed issuance of a license for a residential facility may comment on it in writing to the director within ten days after the director mailed the notice, excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays. If the director receives written comments from any notified officials within the specified time, the director shall make written findings concerning the comments and the director's decision on the issuance of the license. If the director does not receive written comments from any notified local officials within the specified time, the director shall continue the process for issuance of the license.

(M) Any person may operate a licensed residential facility that provides room and board, personal care, habilitation services, and supervision in a family setting for at least six but not more than eight individuals with developmental disabilities as a permitted use in any residential district or zone, including any single-family residential district or zone, of any political subdivision. These residential facilities may be required to comply with area, height, yard, and architectural compatibility requirements that are uniformly imposed upon all single-family residences within the district or zone.

(N) Any person may operate a licensed residential facility that provides room and board, personal care, habilitation services, and supervision in a family setting for at least nine but not more than sixteen individuals with developmental disabilities as a permitted use in any multiple-family residential district or zone of any political subdivision, except that a political subdivision that has enacted a zoning ordinance or resolution establishing planned unit development districts may exclude these residential facilities from those districts, and a political subdivision that has enacted a zoning ordinance or resolution may regulate these residential facilities in multiple-family residential districts or zones as a conditionally permitted use or special exception, in either case, under reasonable and specific standards and conditions set out in the zoning ordinance or resolution to:

(I) Require the architectural design and site layout of the residential facility and the location, nature, and height of any walls, screens, and fences to be compatible with adjoining land uses and the residential character of the neighborhood;



(2) Require compliance with yard, parking, and sign regulation;

(3) Limit excessive concentration of these residential facilities.

(O) This section does not prohibit a political subdivision from applying to residential facilities nondiscriminatory regulations requiring compliance with health, fire, and safety regulations and building standards and regulations.

(P) Divisions (M) and (N) of this section are not applicable to municipal corporations that had in effect on June 15, 1977, an ordinance specifically permitting in residential zones licensed residential facilities by means of permitted uses, conditional uses, or special exception, so long as such ordinance remains in effect without any substantive modification.

(Q)(1) The director may issue an interim license to operate a residential facility to an applicant for a license under this section if either of the following is the case:

(a) The director determines that an emergency exists requiring immediate placement of individuals in a residential facility, that insufficient licensed beds are available, and that the residential facility is likely to receive a permanent license under this section within thirty days after issuance of the interim license.

(b) The director determines that the issuance of an interim license is necessary to meet a temporary need for a residential facility.

(2) To be eligible to receive an interim license, an applicant must meet the same criteria that must be met to receive a permanent license under this section, except for any differing procedures and time frames that may apply to issuance of a permanent license.

(3) An interim license shall be valid for thirty days and may be renewed by the director for a period not to exceed one hundred eighty days.

(4) The director shall adopt rules in accordance with Chapter 119. of the Revised Code as the



director considers necessary to administer the issuance of interim licenses.

(R) Notwithstanding rules adopted pursuant to this section establishing the maximum number of individuals who may be served in a particular type of residential facility, a residential facility shall be permitted to serve the same number of individuals being served by the facility on the effective date of the rules or the number of individuals for which the facility is authorized pursuant to a current application for a certificate of need with a letter of support from the department of developmental disabilities and which is in the review process prior to April 4, 1986.

This division does not preclude the department from suspending new admissions to a residential facility pursuant to a written order issued under section 5124.70 of the Revised Code.

(S) The director may enter at any time, for purposes of investigation, any home, facility, or other structure that has been reported to the director or that the director has reasonable cause to believe is being operated as a residential facility without a license issued under this section.

The director may petition the court of common pleas of the county in which an unlicensed residential facility is located for an order enjoining the person or governmental agency operating the facility from continuing to operate without a license. The court may grant the injunction on a showing that the person or governmental agency named in the petition is operating a residential facility without a license. The court may grant the injunction, regardless of whether the residential facility meets the requirements for receiving a license under this section.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
OFFICE OF FAIR HOUSING AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION

Washington, D.C.
November 10, 2016

**JOINT STATEMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN
DEVELOPMENT AND THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**

**STATE AND LOCAL LAND USE LAWS AND PRACTICES AND THE APPLICATION
OF THE FAIR HOUSING ACT**

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Justice (“DOJ”) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”) are jointly responsible for enforcing the Federal Fair Housing Act (“the Act”),¹ which prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status (children under 18 living with a parent or guardian), or national origin.² The Act prohibits housing-related policies and practices that exclude or otherwise discriminate against individuals because of protected characteristics.

The regulation of land use and zoning is traditionally reserved to state and local governments, except to the extent that it conflicts with requirements imposed by the Fair Housing Act or other federal laws. This Joint Statement provides an overview of the Fair Housing Act’s requirements relating to state and local land use practices and zoning laws, including conduct related to group homes. It updates and expands upon DOJ’s and HUD’s Joint

¹ The Fair Housing Act is codified at 42 U.S.C. §§ 3601–19.

² The Act uses the term “handicap” instead of “disability.” Both terms have the same legal meaning. *See Bragdon v. Abbott*, 524 U.S. 624, 631 (1998) (noting that the definition of “disability” in the Americans with Disabilities Act

Statement on Group Homes, Local Land Use, and the Fair Housing Act, issued on August 18, 1999. The first section of the Joint Statement, Questions 1–6, describes generally the Act’s requirements as they pertain to land use and zoning. The second and third sections, Questions 7–25, discuss more specifically how the Act applies to land use and zoning laws affecting housing for persons with disabilities, including guidance on regulating group homes and the requirement to provide reasonable accommodations. The fourth section, Questions 26–27, addresses HUD’s and DOJ’s enforcement of the Act in the land use and zoning context.

This Joint Statement focuses on the Fair Housing Act, not on other federal civil rights laws that prohibit state and local governments from adopting or implementing land use and zoning practices that discriminate based on a protected characteristic, such as Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”),³ Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (“Section 504”),⁴ and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.⁵ In addition, the Joint Statement does not address a state or local government’s duty to affirmatively further fair housing, even though state and local governments that receive HUD assistance are subject to this duty. For additional information provided by DOJ and HUD regarding these issues, see the list of resources provided in the answer to Question 27.

Questions and Answers on the Fair Housing Act and State and Local Land Use Laws and Zoning

1. How does the Fair Housing Act apply to state and local land use and zoning?

The Fair Housing Act prohibits a broad range of housing practices that discriminate against individuals on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, or national origin (commonly referred to as protected characteristics). As established by the Supremacy Clause of the U.S. Constitution, federal laws such as the Fair Housing Act take precedence over conflicting state and local laws. The Fair Housing Act thus prohibits state and local land use and zoning laws, policies, and practices that discriminate based on a characteristic protected under the Act. Prohibited practices as defined in the Act include making unavailable or denying housing because of a protected characteristic. Housing includes not only buildings intended for occupancy as residences, but also vacant land that may be developed into residences.

is drawn almost verbatim “from the definition of ‘handicap’ contained in the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988”). This document uses the term “disability,” which is more generally accepted.

³ 42 U.S.C. § 12132.

⁴ 29 U.S.C. § 794.

⁵ 42 U.S.C. § 2000d.

2. What types of land use and zoning laws or practices violate the Fair Housing Act?

Examples of state and local land use and zoning laws or practices that may violate the Act include:

- Prohibiting or restricting the development of housing based on the belief that the residents will be members of a particular protected class, such as race, disability, or familial status, by, for example, placing a moratorium on the development of multifamily housing because of concerns that the residents will include members of a particular protected class.
- Imposing restrictions or additional conditions on group housing for persons with disabilities that are not imposed on families or other groups of unrelated individuals, by, for example, requiring an occupancy permit for persons with disabilities to live in a single-family home while not requiring a permit for other residents of single-family homes.
- Imposing restrictions on housing because of alleged public safety concerns that are based on stereotypes about the residents' or anticipated residents' membership in a protected class, by, for example, requiring a proposed development to provide additional security measures based on a belief that persons of a particular protected class are more likely to engage in criminal activity.
- Enforcing otherwise neutral laws or policies differently because of the residents' protected characteristics, by, for example, citing individuals who are members of a particular protected class for violating code requirements for property upkeep while not citing other residents for similar violations.
- Refusing to provide reasonable accommodations to land use or zoning policies when such accommodations may be necessary to allow persons with disabilities to have an equal opportunity to use and enjoy the housing, by, for example, denying a request to modify a setback requirement so an accessible sidewalk or ramp can be provided for one or more persons with mobility disabilities.

3. When does a land use or zoning practice constitute intentional discrimination in violation of the Fair Housing Act?

Intentional discrimination is also referred to as disparate treatment, meaning that the action treats a person or group of persons differently because of race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, or national origin. A land use or zoning practice may be intentionally discriminatory even if there is no personal bias or animus on the part of individual government officials. For example, municipal zoning practices or decisions that reflect acquiescence to community bias may be intentionally discriminatory, even if the officials themselves do not personally share such bias. (See Q&A 5.) Intentional discrimination does not require that the

decision-makers were hostile toward members of a particular protected class. Decisions motivated by a purported desire to benefit a particular group can also violate the Act if they result in differential treatment because of a protected characteristic.

A land use or zoning practice may be discriminatory on its face. For example, a law that requires persons with disabilities to request permits to live in single-family zones while not requiring persons without disabilities to request such permits violates the Act because it treats persons with disabilities differently based on their disability. Even a law that is seemingly neutral will still violate the Act if enacted with discriminatory intent. In that instance, the analysis of whether there is intentional discrimination will be based on a variety of factors, all of which need not be satisfied. These factors include, but are not limited to: (1) the “impact” of the municipal practice, such as whether an ordinance disproportionately impacts minority residents compared to white residents or whether the practice perpetuates segregation in a neighborhood or particular geographic area; (2) the “historical background” of the action, such as whether there is a history of segregation or discriminatory conduct by the municipality; (3) the “specific sequence of events,” such as whether the city adopted an ordinance or took action only after significant, racially-motivated community opposition to a housing development or changed course after learning that a development would include non-white residents; (4) departures from the “normal procedural sequence,” such as whether a municipality deviated from normal application or zoning requirements; (5) “substantive departures,” such as whether the factors usually considered important suggest that a state or local government should have reached a different result; and (6) the “legislative or administrative history,” such as any statements by members of the state or local decision-making body.⁶

4. Can state and local land use and zoning laws or practices violate the Fair Housing Act if the state or locality did not intend to discriminate against persons on a prohibited basis?

Yes. Even absent a discriminatory intent, state or local governments may be liable under the Act for any land use or zoning law or practice that has an unjustified discriminatory effect because of a protected characteristic. In 2015, the United States Supreme Court affirmed this interpretation of the Act in *Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs v. Inclusive Communities Project, Inc.*⁷ The Court stated that “[t]hese unlawful practices include zoning laws and other housing restrictions that function unfairly to exclude minorities from certain neighborhoods without any sufficient justification.”⁸

⁶ *Vill. of Arlington Heights v. Metro. Hous. Dev. Corp.*, 429 U.S. 252, 265–68 (1977).

⁷ ___ U.S. ___, 135 S. Ct. 2507 (2015).

⁸ *Id.* at 2521–22.

A land use or zoning practice results in a discriminatory effect if it caused or predictably will cause a disparate impact on a group of persons or if it creates, increases, reinforces, or perpetuates segregated housing patterns because of a protected characteristic. A state or local government still has the opportunity to show that the practice is necessary to achieve one or more of its substantial, legitimate, nondiscriminatory interests. These interests must be supported by evidence and may not be hypothetical or speculative. If these interests could not be served by another practice that has a less discriminatory effect, then the practice does not violate the Act. The standard for evaluating housing-related practices with a discriminatory effect are set forth in HUD's Discriminatory Effects Rule, 24 C.F.R. § 100.500.

Examples of land use practices that violate the Fair Housing Act under a discriminatory effects standard include minimum floor space or lot size requirements that increase the size and cost of housing if such an increase has the effect of excluding persons from a locality or neighborhood because of their membership in a protected class, without a legally sufficient justification. Similarly, prohibiting low-income or multifamily housing may have a discriminatory effect on persons because of their membership in a protected class and, if so, would violate the Act absent a legally sufficient justification.

5. Does a state or local government violate the Fair Housing Act if it considers the fears or prejudices of community members when enacting or applying its zoning or land use laws respecting housing?

When enacting or applying zoning or land use laws, state and local governments may not act because of the fears, prejudices, stereotypes, or unsubstantiated assumptions that community members may have about current or prospective residents because of the residents' protected characteristics. Doing so violates the Act, even if the officials themselves do not personally share such bias. For example, a city may not deny zoning approval for a low-income housing development that meets all zoning and land use requirements because the development may house residents of a particular protected class or classes whose presence, the community fears, will increase crime and lower property values in the surrounding neighborhood. Similarly, a local government may not block a group home or deny a requested reasonable accommodation in response to neighbors' stereotypical fears or prejudices about persons with disabilities or a particular type of disability. Of course, a city council or zoning board is not bound by everything that is said by every person who speaks at a public hearing. It is the record as a whole that will be determinative.

6. Can state and local governments violate the Fair Housing Act if they adopt or implement restrictions against children?

Yes. State and local governments may not impose restrictions on where families with children may reside unless the restrictions are consistent with the “housing for older persons” exemption of the Act. The most common types of housing for older persons that may qualify for this exemption are: (1) housing intended for, and solely occupied by, persons 62 years of age or older; and (2) housing in which 80% of the occupied units have at least one person who is 55 years of age or older that publishes and adheres to policies and procedures demonstrating the intent to house older persons. These types of housing must meet all requirements of the exemption, including complying with HUD regulations applicable to such housing, such as verification procedures regarding the age of the occupants. A state or local government that zones an area to exclude families with children under 18 years of age must continually ensure that housing in that zone meets all requirements of the exemption. If all of the housing in that zone does not continue to meet all such requirements, that state or local government violates the Act.

**Questions and Answers on the Fair Housing Act and
Local Land Use and Zoning Regulation of Group Homes**

7. Who qualifies as a person with a disability under the Fair Housing Act?

The Fair Housing Act defines a person with a disability to include (1) individuals with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; (2) individuals who are regarded as having such an impairment; and (3) individuals with a record of such an impairment.

The term “physical or mental impairment” includes, but is not limited to, diseases and conditions such as orthopedic, visual, speech and hearing impairments, cerebral palsy, autism, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, HIV infection, developmental disabilities, mental illness, drug addiction (other than addiction caused by current, illegal use of a controlled substance), and alcoholism.

The term “major life activity” includes activities such as seeing, hearing, walking, breathing, performing manual tasks, caring for one’s self, learning, speaking, and working. This list of major life activities is not exhaustive.

Being regarded as having a disability means that the individual is treated as if he or she has a disability even though the individual may not have an impairment or may not have an impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. For example, if a landlord

refuses to rent to a person because the landlord believes the prospective tenant has a disability, then the landlord violates the Act's prohibition on discrimination on the basis of disability, even if the prospective tenant does not actually have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

Having a record of a disability means the individual has a history of, or has been misclassified as having, a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

8. What is a group home within the meaning of the Fair Housing Act?

The term "group home" does not have a specific legal meaning; land use and zoning officials and the courts, however, have referred to some residences for persons with disabilities as group homes. The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability, and persons with disabilities have the same Fair Housing Act protections whether or not their housing is considered a group home. A household where two or more persons with disabilities choose to live together, as a matter of association, may not be subjected to requirements or conditions that are not imposed on households consisting of persons without disabilities.

In this Statement, the term "group home" refers to a dwelling that is or will be occupied by unrelated persons with disabilities. Sometimes group homes serve individuals with a particular type of disability, and sometimes they serve individuals with a variety of disabilities. Some group homes provide residents with in-home support services of varying types, while others do not. The provision of support services is not required for a group home to be protected under the Fair Housing Act. Group homes, as discussed in this Statement, may be opened by individuals or by organizations, both for-profit and not-for-profit. Sometimes it is the group home operator or developer, rather than the individuals who live or are expected to live in the home, who interacts with a state or local government agency about developing or operating the group home, and sometimes there is no interaction among residents or operators and state or local governments.

In this Statement, the term "group home" includes homes occupied by persons in recovery from alcohol or substance abuse, who are persons with disabilities under the Act. Although a group home for persons in recovery may commonly be called a "sober home," the term does not have a specific legal meaning, and the Act treats persons with disabilities who reside in such homes no differently than persons with disabilities who reside in other types of group homes. Like other group homes, homes for persons in recovery are sometimes operated by individuals or organizations, both for-profit and not-for-profit, and support services or supervision are sometimes, but not always, provided. The Act does not require a person who resides in a home for persons in recovery to have participated in or be currently participating in a

substance abuse treatment program to be considered a person with a disability. The fact that a resident of a group home may currently be illegally using a controlled substance does not deprive the other residents of the protection of the Fair Housing Act.

9. In what ways does the Fair Housing Act apply to group homes?

The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability, and persons with disabilities have the same Fair Housing Act protections whether or not their housing is considered a group home. State and local governments may not discriminate against persons with disabilities who live in group homes. Persons with disabilities who live in or seek to live in group homes are sometimes subjected to unlawful discrimination in a number of ways, including those discussed in the preceding Section of this Joint Statement. Discrimination may be intentional; for example, a locality might pass an ordinance prohibiting group homes in single-family neighborhoods or prohibiting group homes for persons with certain disabilities. These ordinances are facially discriminatory, in violation of the Act. In addition, as discussed more fully in Q&A 10 below, a state or local government may violate the Act by refusing to grant a reasonable accommodation to its zoning or land use ordinance when the requested accommodation may be necessary for persons with disabilities to have an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling. For example, if a locality refuses to waive an ordinance that limits the number of unrelated persons who may live in a single-family home where such a waiver may be necessary for persons with disabilities to have an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling, the locality violates the Act unless the locality can prove that the waiver would impose an undue financial and administrative burden on the local government or fundamentally alter the essential nature of the locality's zoning scheme. Furthermore, a state or local government may violate the Act by enacting an ordinance that has an unjustified discriminatory effect on persons with disabilities who seek to live in a group home in the community. Unlawful actions concerning group homes are discussed in more detail throughout this Statement.

10. What is a reasonable accommodation under the Fair Housing Act?

The Fair Housing Act makes it unlawful to refuse to make "reasonable accommodations" to rules, policies, practices, or services, when such accommodations may be necessary to afford persons with disabilities an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling. A "reasonable accommodation" is a change, exception, or adjustment to a rule, policy, practice, or service that may be necessary for a person with a disability to have an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling, including public and common use spaces. Since rules, policies, practices, and services may have a different effect on persons with disabilities than on other persons, treating persons with disabilities exactly the same as others may sometimes deny them an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling.

Even if a zoning ordinance imposes on group homes the same restrictions that it imposes on housing for other groups of unrelated persons, a local government may be required, in individual cases and when requested to do so, to grant a reasonable accommodation to a group home for persons with disabilities. What constitutes a reasonable accommodation is a case-by-case determination based on an individualized assessment. This topic is discussed in detail in Q&As 20–25 and in the HUD/DOJ Joint Statement on Reasonable Accommodations under the Fair Housing Act.

11. Does the Fair Housing Act protect persons with disabilities who pose a “direct threat” to others?

The Act does not allow for the exclusion of individuals based upon fear, speculation, or stereotype about a particular disability or persons with disabilities in general. Nevertheless, the Act does not protect an individual whose tenancy would constitute a “direct threat” to the health or safety of other individuals or whose tenancy would result in substantial physical damage to the property of others unless the threat or risk to property can be eliminated or significantly reduced by reasonable accommodation. A determination that an individual poses a direct threat must rely on an individualized assessment that is based on reliable objective evidence (for example, current conduct or a recent history of overt acts). The assessment must consider: (1) the nature, duration, and severity of the risk of injury; (2) the probability that injury will actually occur; and (3) whether there are any reasonable accommodations that will eliminate or significantly reduce the direct threat. See Q&A 10 for a general discussion of reasonable accommodations. Consequently, in evaluating an individual’s recent history of overt acts, a state or local government must take into account whether the individual has received intervening treatment or medication that has eliminated or significantly reduced the direct threat (in other words, significant risk of substantial harm). In such a situation, the state or local government may request that the individual show how the circumstances have changed so that he or she no longer poses a direct threat. Any such request must be reasonable and limited to information necessary to assess whether circumstances have changed. Additionally, in such a situation, a state or local government may obtain satisfactory and reasonable assurances that the individual will not pose a direct threat during the tenancy. The state or local government must have reliable, objective evidence that the tenancy of a person with a disability poses a direct threat before excluding him or her from housing on that basis, and, in making that assessment, the state or local government may not ignore evidence showing that the individual’s tenancy would no longer pose a direct threat. Moreover, the fact that one individual may pose a direct threat does not mean that another individual with the same disability or other individuals in a group home may be denied housing.

12. Can a state or local government enact laws that specifically limit group homes for individuals with specific types of disabilities?

No. Just as it would be illegal to enact a law for the purpose of excluding or limiting group homes for individuals with disabilities, it is illegal under the Act for local land use and zoning laws to exclude or limit group homes for individuals with specific types of disabilities. For example, a government may not limit group homes for persons with mental illness to certain neighborhoods. The fact that the state or local government complies with the Act with regard to group homes for persons with some types of disabilities will not justify discrimination against individuals with another type of disability, such as mental illness.

13. Can a state or local government limit the number of individuals who reside in a group home in a residential neighborhood?

Neutral laws that govern groups of unrelated persons who live together do not violate the Act so long as (1) those laws do not intentionally discriminate against persons on the basis of disability (or other protected class), (2) those laws do not have an unjustified discriminatory effect on the basis of disability (or other protected class), and (3) state and local governments make reasonable accommodations when such accommodations may be necessary for a person with a disability to have an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling.

Local zoning and land use laws that treat groups of unrelated persons with disabilities less favorably than similar groups of unrelated persons without disabilities violate the Fair Housing Act. For example, suppose a city's zoning ordinance defines a "family" to include up to a certain number of unrelated persons living together as a household unit, and gives such a group of unrelated persons the right to live in any zoning district without special permission from the city. If that ordinance also prohibits a group home having the same number of persons with disabilities in a certain district or requires it to seek a use permit, the ordinance would violate the Fair Housing Act. The ordinance violates the Act because it treats persons with disabilities less favorably than families and unrelated persons without disabilities.

A local government may generally restrict the ability of groups of unrelated persons to live together without violating the Act as long as the restrictions are imposed on all such groups, including a group defined as a family. Thus, if the definition of a family includes up to a certain number of unrelated individuals, an ordinance would not, on its face, violate the Act if a group home for persons with disabilities with more than the permitted number for a family were not allowed to locate in a single-family-zoned neighborhood because any group of unrelated people without disabilities of that number would also be disallowed. A facially neutral ordinance, however, still may violate the Act if it is intentionally discriminatory (that is, enacted with discriminatory intent or applied in a discriminatory manner), or if it has an unjustified

discriminatory effect on persons with disabilities. For example, an ordinance that limits the number of unrelated persons who may constitute a family may violate the Act if it is enacted for the purpose of limiting the number of persons with disabilities who may live in a group home, or if it has the unjustified discriminatory effect of excluding or limiting group homes in the jurisdiction. Governments may also violate the Act if they enforce such restrictions more strictly against group homes than against groups of the same number of unrelated persons without disabilities who live together in housing. In addition, as discussed in detail below, because the Act prohibits the denial of reasonable accommodations to rules and policies for persons with disabilities, a group home that provides housing for a number of persons with disabilities that exceeds the number allowed under the family definition has the right to seek an exception or waiver. If the criteria for a reasonable accommodation are met, the permit must be given in that instance, but the ordinance would not be invalid.⁹

14. How does the Supreme Court's ruling in *Olmstead* apply to the Fair Housing Act?

In *Olmstead v. L.C.*,¹⁰ the Supreme Court ruled that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits the unjustified segregation of persons with disabilities in institutional settings where necessary services could reasonably be provided in integrated, community-based settings. An integrated setting is one that enables individuals with disabilities to live and interact with individuals without disabilities to the fullest extent possible. By contrast, a segregated setting includes congregate settings populated exclusively or primarily by individuals with disabilities. Although *Olmstead* did not interpret the Fair Housing Act, the objectives of the Fair Housing Act and the ADA, as interpreted in *Olmstead*, are consistent. The Fair Housing Act ensures that persons with disabilities have an equal opportunity to choose the housing where they wish to live. The ADA and *Olmstead* ensure that persons with disabilities also have the option to live and receive services in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs. The integration mandate of the ADA and *Olmstead* can be implemented without impairing the rights protected by the Fair Housing Act. For example, state and local governments that provide or fund housing, health care, or support services must comply with the integration mandate by providing these programs, services, and activities in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of individuals with disabilities. State and local governments may comply with this requirement by adopting standards for the housing, health care, or support services they provide or fund that are reasonable, individualized, and specifically tailored to enable individuals with disabilities to live and interact with individuals without disabilities to the fullest extent possible. Local governments should be aware that ordinances and policies that impose additional restrictions on housing or residential services for persons with disabilities that are not imposed on housing or

⁹ Laws that limit the number of occupants per unit do not violate the Act as long as they are reasonable, are applied to all occupants, and do not operate to discriminate on the basis of disability, familial status, or other characteristics protected by the Act.

¹⁰ 527 U.S. 581 (1999).

residential services for persons without disabilities are likely to violate the Act. In addition, a locality would violate the Act and the integration mandate of the ADA and *Olmstead* if it required group homes to be concentrated in certain areas of the jurisdiction by, for example, restricting them from being located in other areas.

15. Can a state or local government impose spacing requirements on the location of group homes for persons with disabilities?

A “spacing” or “dispersal” requirement generally refers to a requirement that a group home for persons with disabilities must not be located within a specific distance of another group home. Sometimes a spacing requirement is designed so it applies only to group homes and sometimes a spacing requirement is framed more generally and applies to group homes and other types of uses such as boarding houses, student housing, or even certain types of businesses. In a community where a certain number of unrelated persons are permitted by local ordinance to reside together in a home, it would violate the Act for the local ordinance to impose a spacing requirement on group homes that do not exceed that permitted number of residents because the spacing requirement would be a condition imposed on persons with disabilities that is not imposed on persons without disabilities. In situations where a group home seeks a reasonable accommodation to exceed the number of unrelated persons who are permitted by local ordinance to reside together, the Fair Housing Act does not prevent state or local governments from taking into account concerns about the over-concentration of group homes that are located in close proximity to each other. Sometimes compliance with the integration mandate of the ADA and *Olmstead* requires government agencies responsible for licensing or providing housing for persons with disabilities to consider the location of other group homes when determining what housing will best meet the needs of the persons being served. Some courts, however, have found that spacing requirements violate the Fair Housing Act because they deny persons with disabilities an equal opportunity to choose where they will live. Because an across-the-board spacing requirement may discriminate against persons with disabilities in some residential areas, any standards that state or local governments adopt should evaluate the location of group homes for persons with disabilities on a case-by-case basis.

Where a jurisdiction has imposed a spacing requirement on the location of group homes for persons with disabilities, courts may analyze whether the requirement violates the Act under an intent, effects, or reasonable accommodation theory. In cases alleging intentional discrimination, courts look to a number of factors, including the effect of the requirement on housing for persons with disabilities; the jurisdiction’s intent behind the spacing requirement; the existence, size, and location of group homes in a given area; and whether there are methods other than a spacing requirement for accomplishing the jurisdiction’s stated purpose. A spacing requirement enacted with discriminatory intent, such as for the purpose of appeasing neighbors’ stereotypical fears about living near persons with disabilities, violates the Act. Further, a neutral

spacing requirement that applies to all housing for groups of unrelated persons may have an unjustified discriminatory effect on persons with disabilities, thus violating the Act. Jurisdictions must also consider, in compliance with the Act, requests for reasonable accommodations to any spacing requirements.

16. Can a state or local government impose health and safety regulations on group home operators?

Operators of group homes for persons with disabilities are subject to applicable state and local regulations addressing health and safety concerns unless those regulations are inconsistent with the Fair Housing Act or other federal law. Licensing and other regulatory requirements that may apply to some group homes must also be consistent with the Fair Housing Act. Such regulations must not be based on stereotypes about persons with disabilities or specific types of disabilities. State or local zoning and land use ordinances may not, consistent with the Fair Housing Act, require individuals with disabilities to receive medical, support, or other services or supervision that they do not need or want as a condition for allowing a group home to operate. State and local governments' enforcement of neutral requirements regarding safety, licensing, and other regulatory requirements governing group homes do not violate the Fair Housing Act so long as the ordinances are enforced in a neutral manner, they do not specifically target group homes, and they do not have an unjustified discriminatory effect on persons with disabilities who wish to reside in group homes.

Governments must also consider requests for reasonable accommodations to licensing and regulatory requirements and procedures, and grant them where they may be necessary to afford individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling, as required by the Act.

17. Can a state or local government address suspected criminal activity or fraud and abuse at group homes for persons with disabilities?

The Fair Housing Act does not prevent state and local governments from taking nondiscriminatory action in response to criminal activity, insurance fraud, Medicaid fraud, neglect or abuse of residents, or other illegal conduct occurring at group homes, including reporting complaints to the appropriate state or federal regulatory agency. States and localities must ensure that actions to enforce criminal or other laws are not taken to target group homes and are applied equally, regardless of whether the residents of housing are persons with disabilities. For example, persons with disabilities residing in group homes are entitled to the same constitutional protections against unreasonable search and seizure as those without disabilities.

18. Does the Fair Housing Act permit a state or local government to implement strategies to integrate group homes for persons with disabilities in particular neighborhoods where they are not currently located?

Yes. Some strategies a state or local government could use to further the integration of group housing for persons with disabilities, consistent with the Act, include affirmative marketing or offering incentives. For example, jurisdictions may engage in affirmative marketing or offer variances to providers of housing for persons with disabilities to locate future homes in neighborhoods where group homes for persons with disabilities are not currently located. But jurisdictions may not offer incentives for a discriminatory purpose or that have an unjustified discriminatory effect because of a protected characteristic.

19. Can a local government consider the fears or prejudices of neighbors in deciding whether a group home can be located in a particular neighborhood?

In the same way a local government would violate the law if it rejected low-income housing in a community because of neighbors' fears that such housing would be occupied by racial minorities (see Q&A 5), a local government violates the law if it blocks a group home or denies a reasonable accommodation request because of neighbors' stereotypical fears or prejudices about persons with disabilities. This is so even if the individual government decision-makers themselves do not have biases against persons with disabilities.

Not all community opposition to requests by group homes is necessarily discriminatory. For example, when a group home seeks a reasonable accommodation to operate in an area and the area has limited on-street parking to serve existing residents, it is not a violation of the Fair Housing Act for neighbors and local government officials to raise concerns that the group home may create more demand for on-street parking than would a typical family and to ask the provider to respond. A valid unaddressed concern about inadequate parking facilities could justify denying the requested accommodation, if a similar dwelling that is not a group home or similarly situated use would ordinarily be denied a permit because of such parking concerns. If, however, the group home shows that the home will not create a need for more parking spaces than other dwellings or similarly-situated uses located nearby, or submits a plan to provide any needed off-street parking, then parking concerns would not support a decision to deny the home a permit.

Questions and Answers on the Fair Housing Act and Reasonable Accommodation Requests to Local Zoning and Land Use Laws

20. When does a state or local government violate the Fair Housing Act by failing to grant a request for a reasonable accommodation?

A state or local government violates the Fair Housing Act by failing to grant a reasonable accommodation request if (1) the persons requesting the accommodation or, in the case of a group home, persons residing in or expected to reside in the group home are persons with a disability under the Act; (2) the state or local government knows or should reasonably be expected to know of their disabilities; (3) an accommodation in the land use or zoning ordinance or other rules, policies, practices, or services of the state or locality was requested by or on behalf of persons with disabilities; (4) the requested accommodation may be necessary to afford one or more persons with a disability an equal opportunity to use and enjoy the dwelling; (5) the state or local government refused to grant, failed to act on, or unreasonably delayed the accommodation request; and (6) the state or local government cannot show that granting the accommodation would impose an undue financial and administrative burden on the local government or that it would fundamentally alter the local government's zoning scheme. A requested accommodation may be necessary if there is an identifiable relationship between the requested accommodation and the group home residents' disability. Further information is provided in Q&A 10 above and the HUD/DOJ Joint Statement on Reasonable Accommodations under the Fair Housing Act.

21. Can a local government deny a group home's request for a reasonable accommodation without violating the Fair Housing Act?

Yes, a local government may deny a group home's request for a reasonable accommodation if the request was not made by or on behalf of persons with disabilities (by, for example, the group home developer or operator) or if there is no disability-related need for the requested accommodation because there is no relationship between the requested accommodation and the disabilities of the residents or proposed residents.

In addition, a group home's request for a reasonable accommodation may be denied by a local government if providing the accommodation is not reasonable—in other words, if it would impose an undue financial and administrative burden on the local government or it would fundamentally alter the local government's zoning scheme. The determination of undue financial and administrative burden must be decided on a case-by-case basis involving various factors, such as the nature and extent of the administrative burden and the cost of the requested accommodation to the local government, the financial resources of the local government, and the benefits that the accommodation would provide to the persons with disabilities who will reside in the group home.

When a local government refuses an accommodation request because it would pose an undue financial and administrative burden, the local government should discuss with the requester whether there is an alternative accommodation that would effectively address the disability-related needs of the group home's residents without imposing an undue financial and administrative burden. This discussion is called an "interactive process." If an alternative accommodation would effectively meet the disability-related needs of the residents of the group home and is reasonable (that is, it would not impose an undue financial and administrative burden or fundamentally alter the local government's zoning scheme), the local government must grant the alternative accommodation. An interactive process in which the group home and the local government discuss the disability-related need for the requested accommodation and possible alternative accommodations is both required under the Act and helpful to all concerned, because it often results in an effective accommodation for the group home that does not pose an undue financial and administrative burden or fundamental alteration for the local government.

22. What is the procedure for requesting a reasonable accommodation?

The reasonable accommodation must actually be requested by or on behalf of the individuals with disabilities who reside or are expected to reside in the group home. When the request is made, it is not necessary for the specific individuals who would be expected to live in the group home to be identified. The Act does not require that a request be made in a particular manner or at a particular time. The group home does not need to mention the Fair Housing Act or use the words "reasonable accommodation" when making a reasonable accommodation request. The group home must, however, make the request in a manner that a reasonable person would understand to be a disability-related request for an exception, change, or adjustment to a rule, policy, practice, or service. When making a request for an exception, change, or adjustment to a local land use or zoning regulation or policy, the group home should explain what type of accommodation is being requested and, if the need for the accommodation is not readily apparent or known by the local government, explain the relationship between the accommodation and the disabilities of the group home residents.

A request for a reasonable accommodation can be made either orally or in writing. It is often helpful for both the group home and the local government if the reasonable accommodation request is made in writing. This will help prevent misunderstandings regarding what is being requested or whether or when the request was made.

Where a local land use or zoning code contains specific procedures for seeking a departure from the general rule, courts have decided that these procedures should ordinarily be followed. If no procedure is specified, or if the procedure is unreasonably burdensome or intrusive or involves significant delays, a request for a reasonable accommodation may,

nevertheless, be made in some other way, and a local government is obligated to grant it if the requested accommodation meets the criteria discussed in Q&A 20, above.

Whether or not the local land use or zoning code contains a specific procedure for requesting a reasonable accommodation or other exception to a zoning regulation, if local government officials have previously made statements or otherwise indicated that an application for a reasonable accommodation would not receive fair consideration, or if the procedure itself is discriminatory, then persons with disabilities living in a group home, and/or its operator, have the right to file a Fair Housing Act complaint in court to request an order for a reasonable accommodation to the local zoning regulations.

23. Does the Fair Housing Act require local governments to adopt formal reasonable accommodation procedures?

The Act does not require a local government to adopt formal procedures for processing requests for reasonable accommodations to local land use or zoning codes. DOJ and HUD nevertheless strongly encourage local governments to adopt formal procedures for identifying and processing reasonable accommodation requests and provide training for government officials and staff as to application of the procedures. Procedures for reviewing and acting on reasonable accommodation requests will help state and local governments meet their obligations under the Act to respond to reasonable accommodation requests and implement reasonable accommodations promptly. Local governments are also encouraged to ensure that the procedures to request a reasonable accommodation or other exception to local zoning regulations are well known throughout the community by, for example, posting them at a readily accessible location and in a digital format accessible to persons with disabilities on the government's website. If a jurisdiction chooses to adopt formal procedures for reasonable accommodation requests, the procedures cannot be onerous or require information beyond what is necessary to show that the individual has a disability and that the requested accommodation is related to that disability. For example, in most cases, an individual's medical record or detailed information about the nature of a person's disability is not necessary for this inquiry. In addition, officials and staff must be aware that any procedures for requesting a reasonable accommodation must also be flexible to accommodate the needs of the individual making a request, including accepting and considering requests that are not made through the official procedure. The adoption of a reasonable accommodation procedure, however, will not cure a zoning ordinance that treats group homes differently than other residential housing with the same number of unrelated persons.

24. What if a local government fails to act promptly on a reasonable accommodation request?

A local government has an obligation to provide prompt responses to reasonable accommodation requests, whether or not a formal reasonable accommodation procedure exists. A local government's undue delay in responding to a reasonable accommodation request may be deemed a failure to provide a reasonable accommodation.

25. Can a local government enforce its zoning code against a group home that violates the zoning code but has not requested a reasonable accommodation?

The Fair Housing Act does not prohibit a local government from enforcing its zoning code against a group home that has violated the local zoning code, as long as that code is not discriminatory or enforced in a discriminatory manner. If, however, the group home requests a reasonable accommodation when faced with enforcement by the locality, the locality still must consider the reasonable accommodation request. A request for a reasonable accommodation may be made at any time, so at that point, the local government must consider whether there is a relationship between the disabilities of the residents of the group home and the need for the requested accommodation. If so, the locality must grant the requested accommodation unless doing so would pose a fundamental alteration to the local government's zoning scheme or an undue financial and administrative burden to the local government.

**Questions and Answers on Fair Housing Act Enforcement of
Complaints Involving Land Use and Zoning**

26. How are Fair Housing Act complaints involving state and local land use laws and practices handled by HUD and DOJ?

The Act gives HUD the power to receive, investigate, and conciliate complaints of discrimination, including complaints that a state or local government has discriminated in exercising its land use and zoning powers. HUD may not issue a charge of discrimination pertaining to "the legality of any State or local zoning or other land use law or ordinance." Rather, after investigating, HUD refers matters it believes may be meritorious to DOJ, which, in its discretion, may decide to bring suit against the state or locality within 18 months after the practice at issue occurred or terminated. DOJ may also bring suit by exercising its authority to initiate litigation alleging a pattern or practice of discrimination or a denial of rights to a group of persons which raises an issue of general public importance.

If HUD determines that there is no reasonable cause to believe that there may be a violation, it will close an investigation without referring the matter to DOJ. But a HUD or DOJ

decision not to proceed with a land use or zoning matter does not foreclose private plaintiffs from pursuing a claim.

Litigation can be an expensive, time-consuming, and uncertain process for all parties. HUD and DOJ encourage parties to land use disputes to explore reasonable alternatives to litigation, including alternative dispute resolution procedures, like mediation or conciliation of the HUD complaint. HUD attempts to conciliate all complaints under the Act that it receives, including those involving land use or zoning laws. In addition, it is DOJ's policy to offer prospective state or local governments the opportunity to engage in pre-suit settlement negotiations, except in the most unusual circumstances.

27. How can I find more information?

For more information on reasonable accommodations and reasonable modifications under the Fair Housing Act:

- HUD/DOJ Joint Statement on Reasonable Accommodations under the Fair Housing Act, available at <https://www.justice.gov/crt/fair-housing-policy-statements-and-guidance-0> or <http://www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/library/huddojstatement.pdf>.
- HUD/DOJ Joint Statement on Reasonable Modifications under the Fair Housing Act, available at <https://www.justice.gov/crt/fair-housing-policy-statements-and-guidance-0> or http://www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/disabilities/reasonable_modifications_mar08.pdf.

For more information on state and local governments' obligations under Section 504:

- HUD website at http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/disabilities/sect504.

For more information on state and local governments' obligations under the ADA and *Olmstead*:

- U.S. Department of Justice website, www.ADA.gov, or call the ADA information line at (800) 514-0301 (voice) or (800) 514-0383 (TTY).
- Statement of the Department of Justice on Enforcement of the Integration Mandate of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and *Olmstead v. L.C.*, available at http://www.ada.gov/olmstead/q&a_olmstead.htm.
- Statement of the Department of Housing and Urban Development on the Role of Housing in Accomplishing the Goals of *Olmstead*, available at <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=OlmsteadGuidnc060413.pdf>.

For more information on the requirement to affirmatively further fair housing:

- Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing, 80 Fed. Reg. 42,272 (July 16, 2015) (to be codified at 24 C.F.R. pts. 5, 91, 92, 570, 574, 576, and 903).
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Version 1, Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Rule Guidebook (2015), *available at* <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/AFFH-Rule-Guidebook.pdf>.
- Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Vol. 1, Fair Housing Planning Guide (1996), *available at* <http://www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/images/fhpg.pdf>.

For more information on nuisance and crime-free ordinances:

- Office of General Counsel Guidance on Application of Fair Housing Act Standards to the Enforcement of Local Nuisance and Crime-Free Housing Ordinances Against Victims of Domestic Violence, Other Crime Victims, and Others Who Require Police or Emergency Services (Sept. 13, 2016), *available at* <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=FinalNuisanceOrdGdnce.pdf>.