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AMENDMENT TO CHAPTER 419 F. S.

Purpose: To amend Ch. 419 F.S. regarding the distancing requirements of community residential homes (group homes) for people with developmental disabilities in order to allow for the development of initiatives for planned residential communities and provide a more cost-effective solution to the operation of group homes – cost savings afforded by unnecessary duplication of services (support staff, transportation, housing). This amendment would not affect the distancing requirements in residential neighborhoods.

Facts:

- Under the existing legislation group homes for people with developmental disabilities must be separated by 1,000 feet leaving no option for planned residential communities in zoning classifications.
- This restriction imposed by the Thousand Foot Rule is interpreted by the Agency for Persons with Disabilities to block the development of planned residential communities by denying licensing and labeling them as “institutions.”
- *More* restrictive, rather than *less* restrictive environments occur in residential neighborhoods where group homes are isolated from each other. Residents have limited freedom to walk about or enjoy recreational facilities safely.
- Community *exclusion*, rather than meaningful community *inclusion* is more often the rule where neighbors typically avoid residents of group homes.
- Natural supports provided by friends and family members are often inaccessible.
- Creative and private initiatives to serve a variety of special needs including employment opportunities are stifled.
- Fundamental human rights are denied:
 - Self-determination
 - Choice of living arrangements and lifestyle guaranteed by the Americans with Disabilities Act as well as overwhelming preference of parents
 - Equality of opportunity which other citizens enjoy in planned residential communities:
safety, shared interests, support services and amenities

Summary: We recognize that Medicaid Waiver services and entitlements via Intermediate Care Facilities (ICF’s) or Developmental Service Institutions (DSI’s) would be far more costly alternatives, if not entirely prohibitive. Please amend the legislation to allow people with developmental disabilities reasonable residential options while affording equal rights with other citizens who enjoy freedom to live in planned, retirement or intentional communities.