



Dear Legislators,

March 20, 2009

Objective: We urge your support of HB 371, the matching bill to SB 1124, which would exempt community residential (group) homes of six or fewer residents located in a Planned Residential Community from the 1,000 foot distancing rule.

Importance: You will find a compendium of 30 heartfelt statements from parents and community leaders who are the real stakeholders on our web site (www.pppflorida.org). Please read and understand why this bill is so important to them.

This bill amending Ch. 419.001 F.S. will allow people with developmental disabilities to enjoy equal rights with other citizens who choose to live close to their neighbors in planned communities. Our "kids" with developmental disabilities similarly need friends, services, supports and above all, safety. They deserve to live in a place where they can walk about freely, ride their bikes, visit each other to play a game, or go out together to see a movie. They can learn and work within or outside the community. Communities throughout the country have accomplished this after starting with very small private initiatives.

- Camphill Communities of North America has organic farming, wood shops, weavery and other crafts, country store, bakery, gymnasium, classrooms, and business apprenticeships, among other wonderful amenities.
- Lamb's Farm in Illinois is famous for many educational and work related opportunities including a restaurant, amusement park, carousel and petting zoo, facilitating interaction with the community at large.
- Bishop Grady Villas in St. Cloud contains six beautiful homes, lovely campus, gardening and wood shops, community center, and an array of daily services such as supported employment and adult day training.

The success of these initiatives inspires many new possibilities. In addition to the unique and varied opportunities Planned Residential Communities can offer, there is a large potential for cost savings afforded by unnecessary duplication of services associated with transportation, maintenance and administration.

Inclusion: We strongly believe that people with developmental disabilities want and deserve true community inclusion, in a setting of their choice, within a community of their choice. The amendment to Ch. 419.001 will afford them this basic human right.

Potential detractors may maintain that the existing Thousand Foot Rule promotes their notion of "inclusion" by isolating residents of group homes from each other. We have observed as parents that residents of isolated group homes aren't "included" in the community. The general rule is that they are avoided, are never invited to neighbors' homes, and in one particularly poignant case, were summarily ignored when they sent a party invitation to their neighbors. Our view is that without this amendment, the Thousand Foot Rule effectively mandates segregation.

(Cont'd.)

Civil Rights: The "Inclusionists," Advocacy Center and FDCC, are state agencies, supported by our tax money, who deny choice. They charge "segregation" and "institution" with connotations of abuse and confinement -- a carryover from the 1970's. The Agency for Persons with Disabilities has historically defended the Thousand Ft. Rule. Similarly, APD vigorously clung to the deleted Administrative Code's 10% Density Rule limiting the number of people in Supported Living to 10% in the smallest geographical area and mandating that homes or apartments be "scattered." The Rule was finally deleted from the DD Handbook last March when we brought it to the attention of AHCA which recognized it as a violation of civil rights.

From our perspective, we are dealing with the same quota system and "scatter" mentality in a rigid 1,000 Ft. Rule which blocks the development of progressive initiatives -- the same civil rights issue.

Choice and Self-Determination: We defend the choice of those who prefer living in the general community, but not at the expense of others. We respectfully remind you that according to Federal Public Law 105-402: "individuals with developmental disabilities and their families are the primary decisionmakers regarding the services and supports such individuals and their families receive...including where the individuals live..."

State agencies should not serve as surrogates to act as primary decisionmakers with one-size-fits-all solutions.

For many years we've worked to advance the concept of Planned Residential Communities in Florida. Unfortunately, private initiatives have failed because of discriminatory density and distancing rules.

We will be deeply indebted to you for finally opening the door for our special needs people to choose where they want to live, and next to whom they want to live, just like other citizens.

Sincerely,

Lila Klausman, Pres.
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