

Dear Legislators,

The Thousand Foot Rule concerning the siting of community residential homes for people with developmental disabilities has again come to the attention of families and individuals facing a critical need for residential options. This rule, contained in Florida Statute 419.01 states that a community residential home shall not be located within a radius of 1,000 feet of another such existing home. The rule has recently been the source of even more stringent legislative efforts to reduce the number and further restrict the location of such homes in residential neighborhoods (Senators Cowin and Lynn, Representative Cantera).

The Thousand Foot Rule now imposes additional limitations to families who are turning to residential communities similar to 55+ and gated communities or villages for “regular folks” as a preferable alternative to scattered group homes and isolated independent living arrangements. For reasons of safety, services, friendship, and inclusion in meaningful community life, this is their overwhelming choice.

But the Thousand Foot Rule again rears its ugly head. The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) has told families that Med Waiver funding for people choosing to live in a residential community, is against the law! The District 7 APD Administrator has explicitly stated that congregate living arrangements violate the Thousand Foot Rule.

Along with the state’s agenda to close down its large developmental disabilities facilities, APD continues to use the Thousand Foot Rule as a tool to shape policy and to label all residential communities as “institutions,” a negative connotation and an unfair and grossly inaccurate generalization.

The movement to rule out categorically under the guise of “community inclusion” and “self-determination,” the same opportunities that you and I and other members of society are free to enjoy is inherently contradictory.

The *misapplication* of the Thousand Foot Rule, designed to limit group homes in a residential neighborhood, is an example of the law of unintended consequences and a violation of the freedom of choice indelibly granted to every citizen by our Federal Government via Section 504 of the Federal Fair Housing Act. To deny our developmentally disabled citizens choice, self-determination and the freedom to live in such a community like every other citizen is so obviously discriminatory.

**We are asking you, therefore, to support an amendment to Ch. 419.01 F.S. that exempts from the Thousand Foot rule a residential community designed to serve the special needs of people with developmental disabilities.**

We would appreciate a response to this letter and also an opportunity to talk to you personally.

Sincerely,