

Hannah Elliott

From: John Eisler
Sent: Thursday, August 22, 2024 2:54 PM
To: Hannah Elliott
Subject: FW: Sunshine Behavioral Health Modification Application_Narrative.DOCX [IWOV-pdx.FID5023150]
Attachments: huddojstatement.pdf; FHA Statement_DOJ.pdf

From: Oswald, Bailey M. <BMOswald@schwabe.com>
Sent: Friday, December 15, 2023 1:23 PM
To: Will VanVactor <Will.VanVactor@crookcountyor.gov>; Katie McDonald <Katie.McDonald@crookcountyor.gov>; John Eisler <John.Eisler@crookcountyor.gov>
Cc: Smith, Adam <asmith@schwabe.com>
Subject: RE: Sunshine Behavioral Health Modification Application_Narrative.DOCX [IWOV-pdx.FID5023150]

Will and Katie,

Thank you for your time this morning. As discussed, attached are the HUD/DOJ statements that we have found particularly helpful with the FHAA/ADA analysis.

Adam will get you some Deschutes County documents soon.

Best,
Bailey

Bailey Oswald

Associate
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Schwabe

From: Oswald, Bailey M.
Sent: Thursday, December 14, 2023 5:53 PM
To: Will VanVactor <Will.VanVactor@crookcountyor.gov>; Katie.McDonald@crookcountyor.gov
Cc: Smith, Adam <asmith@schwabe.com>
Subject: Sunshine Behavioral Health Modification Application_Narrative.DOCX

Will and Katie,

Attached please find our current draft narrative in advance of our pre-app tomorrow.

Apologies for getting this to you so late in the day (and right before the pre-app), but today has been a bit crazy and Adam is even doing another public hearing tonight. Lucky him!

We look forward to your feedback tomorrow.

Best,
Bailey

Bailey Oswald

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION



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

Washington, D.C.
May 17, 2004

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

***REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS UNDER 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 Act¹ (the "Act"), which prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status, and disability.² One type of disability discrimination prohibited by the Act is the refusal to make reasonable accommodations in rules, policies, practices, or services when such accommodations may be necessary to afford a person with a disability the equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling.³ HUD and DOJ frequently respond to complaints alleging that housing providers have violated the Act by refusing reasonable accommodations to persons with disabilities. This Statement provides technical assistance regarding the rights and obligations of persons with disabilities and housing providers under the Act relating to

¹ The Fair Housing Act is codified at 42 U.S.C. §§ 3601 - 3619.

² The Act uses the term "handicap" instead of the term "disability." Both terms have the same legal meaning. See *Bragdon v. Abbott*, 524 U.S. 624, 631 (1998) (noting that definition of "disability" in the Americans with Disabilities Act 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. § 3604(f)(3)(B).

reasonable accommodations.⁴

Questions and Answers

1. What types of discrimination against persons with disabilities does the Act prohibit?

The Act prohibits housing providers from discriminating against applicants or residents because of their disability or the disability of anyone associated with them⁵ and from treating persons with disabilities less favorably than others because of their disability. The Act also makes it unlawful for any person to refuse “to make reasonable accommodations in rules, policies, practices, or services, when such accommodations may be necessary to afford ... person(s) [with disabilities] equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling.”⁶ The Act also prohibits housing providers from refusing residency to persons with disabilities, or placing conditions on their residency, because those persons may require reasonable accommodations. In addition, in certain circumstances, the Act requires that housing providers allow residents to

⁴ Housing providers that receive federal financial assistance are also subject to the requirements of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. 29 U.S.C. § 794. Section 504, and its implementing regulations at 24 C.F.R. Part 8, prohibit discrimination based on disability and require recipients of federal financial assistance to provide reasonable accommodations to applicants and residents with disabilities. Although Section 504 imposes greater obligations than the Fair Housing Act, (*e.g.*, providing and paying for reasonable accommodations that involve structural modifications to units or public and common areas), the principles discussed in this Statement regarding reasonable accommodation under the Fair Housing Act generally apply to requests for reasonable accommodations to rules, policies, practices, and services under Section 504. *See* U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Public and Indian Housing, Notice PIH 2002-01(HA) (www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/disabilities/PIH02-01.pdf) and “Section 504: Frequently Asked Questions,” (www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/disabilities/sect504faq.cfm#anchor272118).

⁵ The Fair Housing Act’s protection against disability discrimination covers not only home seekers with disabilities but also buyers and renters without disabilities who live or are associated with individuals with disabilities 42 U.S.C. § 3604(f)(1)(B), 42 U.S.C. § 3604(f)(1)(C), 42 U.S.C. § 3604(f)(2)(B), 42 U.S.C. § (f)(2)(C). *See also* H.R. Rep. 100-711 – 24 (reprinted in 1988 U.S.C.A.N. 2173, 2184-85) (“The Committee intends these provisions to prohibit not only discrimination against the primary purchaser or named lessee, but also to prohibit denials of housing opportunities to applicants because they have children, parents, friends, spouses, roommates, patients, subtenants or other associates who have disabilities.”). *Accord:* Preamble to Proposed HUD Rules Implementing the Fair Housing Act, 53 Fed. Reg. 45001 (Nov. 7, 1988) (citing House Report).

⁶ 42 U.S.C. § 3604(f)(3)(B). HUD regulations pertaining to reasonable accommodations may be found at 24 C.F.R. § 100.204.

make reasonable structural modifications to units and public/common areas in a dwelling when those modifications may be necessary for a person with a disability to have full enjoyment of a dwelling.⁷ With certain limited exceptions (*see* response to question 2 below), the Act applies to privately and publicly owned housing, including housing subsidized by the federal government or rented through the use of Section 8 voucher assistance.

2. Who must comply with the Fair Housing Act's reasonable accommodation requirements?

Any person or entity engaging in prohibited conduct – *i.e.*, refusing to make reasonable accommodations in rules, policies, practices, or services, when such accommodations may be necessary to afford a person with a disability an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling – may be held liable unless they fall within an exception to the Act's coverage. Courts have applied the Act to individuals, corporations, associations and others involved in the provision of housing and residential lending, including property owners, housing managers, homeowners and condominium associations, lenders, real estate agents, and brokerage services. Courts have also applied the Act to state and local governments, most often in the context of exclusionary zoning or other land-use decisions. *See e.g.*, City of Edmonds v. Oxford House, Inc., 514 U.S. 725, 729 (1995); Project Life v. Glendening, 139 F. Supp. 703, 710 (D. Md. 2001), aff'd 2002 WL 2012545 (4th Cir. 2002). Under specific exceptions to the Fair Housing Act, the reasonable accommodation requirements of the Act do not apply to a private individual owner who sells his own home so long as he (1) does not own more than three single-family homes; (2) does not use a real estate agent and does not employ any discriminatory advertising or notices; (3) has not engaged in a similar sale of a home within a 24-month period; and (4) is not in the business of selling or renting dwellings. The reasonable accommodation requirements of the Fair Housing Act also do not apply to owner-occupied buildings that have four or fewer dwelling units.

3. Who qualifies as a person with a disability under the Act?

The 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, such diseases and conditions as orthopedic, visual, speech and hearing impairments, cerebral palsy, autism, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, Human Immunodeficiency Virus infection, mental retardation, emotional illness, drug addiction (other than addiction caused by current, illegal use of a controlled substance) and alcoholism.

⁷ This Statement does not address the principles relating to reasonable modifications. For further information see the HUD regulations at 24 C.F.R. § 100.203. This statement also does not address the additional requirements imposed on recipients of Federal financial assistance pursuant to Section 504, as explained in the Introduction.

The term "substantially limits" suggests that the limitation is "significant" or "to a large degree."

The term "major life activity" means those activities that are of central importance to daily life, such as seeing, hearing, walking, breathing, performing manual tasks, caring for one's self, learning, and speaking.⁸ This list of major life activities is not exhaustive. *See e.g., Bragdon v. Abbott*, 524 U.S. 624, 691-92 (1998)(holding that for certain individuals reproduction is a major life activity).

4. Does the Act protect juvenile offenders, sex offenders, persons who illegally use controlled substances, and persons with disabilities who pose a significant danger to others?

No, juvenile offenders and sex offenders, by virtue of that status, are not persons with disabilities protected by the Act. Similarly, while the Act does protect persons who are recovering from substance abuse, it does not protect persons who are currently engaging in the current illegal use of controlled substances.⁹ Additionally, the Act does not protect an individual with a disability whose tenancy would constitute a "direct threat" to the health or safety of other individuals or result in substantial physical damage to the property of others unless the threat can be eliminated or significantly reduced by reasonable accommodation.

5. How can a housing provider determine if an individual poses a direct threat?

The Act does not allow for exclusion of individuals based upon fear, speculation, or stereotype about a particular disability or persons with disabilities in general. A determination that an individual poses a direct threat must rely on an individualized assessment that is based on reliable objective evidence (*e.g.*, 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 the direct threat. Consequently, in evaluating a recent history of overt acts, a provider must take into account whether the individual has received intervening treatment or medication that has eliminated the direct threat (*i.e.*, a significant risk of substantial harm). In such a situation, the provider may request that the individual document

⁸ The Supreme Court has questioned but has not yet ruled on whether "working" is to be considered a major life activity. *See Toyota Motor Mfg. Kentucky, Inc. v. Williams*, 122 S. Ct. 681, 692, 693 (2002). If it is a major activity, the Court has noted that a claimant would be required to show an inability to work in a "broad range of jobs" rather than a specific job. *See Sutton v. United Airlines, Inc.*, 527 U.S. 470, 492 (1999).

⁹ *See, e.g., United States v. Southern Management Corp.*, 955 F.2d 914, 919 (4th Cir. 1992) (discussing exclusion in 42 U.S.C. § 3602(h) for "current, illegal use of or addiction to a controlled substance").

how the circumstances have changed so that he no longer poses a direct threat. A provider may also obtain satisfactory assurances that the individual will not pose a direct threat during the tenancy. The housing provider must have reliable, objective evidence that a person with a disability poses a direct threat before excluding him from housing on that basis.

Example 1: A housing provider requires all persons applying to rent an apartment to complete an application that includes information on the applicant's current place of residence. On her application to rent an apartment, a woman notes that she currently resides in Cambridge House. The manager of the apartment complex knows that Cambridge House is a group home for women receiving treatment for alcoholism. Based solely on that information and his personal belief that alcoholics are likely to cause disturbances and damage property, the manager rejects the applicant. The rejection is unlawful because it is based on a generalized stereotype related to a disability rather than an individualized assessment of any threat to other persons or the property of others based on reliable, objective evidence about the applicant's recent past conduct. The housing provider may not treat this applicant differently than other applicants based on his subjective perceptions of the potential problems posed by her alcoholism by requiring additional documents, imposing different lease terms, or requiring a higher security deposit. However, the manager could have checked this applicant's references to the same extent and in the same manner as he would have checked any other applicant's references. If such a reference check revealed objective evidence showing that this applicant had posed a direct threat to persons or property in the recent past and the direct threat had not been eliminated, the manager could then have rejected the applicant based on direct threat.

Example 2: James X, a tenant at the Shady Oaks apartment complex, is arrested for threatening his neighbor while brandishing a baseball bat. The Shady Oaks' lease agreement contains a term prohibiting tenants from threatening violence against other residents. Shady Oaks' rental manager investigates the incident and learns that James X threatened the other resident with physical violence and had to be physically restrained by other neighbors to keep him from acting on his threat. Following Shady Oaks' standard practice of strictly enforcing its "no threats" policy, the Shady Oaks rental manager issues James X a 30-day notice to quit, which is the first step in the eviction process. James X's attorney contacts Shady Oaks' rental manager and explains that James X has a psychiatric disability that causes him to be physically violent when he stops taking his prescribed medication. Suggesting that his client will not pose a direct threat to others if proper safeguards are taken, the attorney requests that the rental manager grant James X an exception to the "no threats" policy as a reasonable accommodation based on James X's disability. The Shady Oaks rental manager need only grant the reasonable accommodation if James X's attorney can provide satisfactory assurance that James X will receive appropriate counseling and

periodic medication monitoring so that he will no longer pose a direct threat during his tenancy. After consulting with James X, the attorney responds that James X is unwilling to receive counseling or submit to any type of periodic monitoring to ensure that he takes his prescribed medication. The rental manager may go forward with the eviction proceeding, since James X continues to pose a direct threat to the health or safety of other residents.

6. What is a "reasonable accommodation" for purposes of the Act?

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 will sometimes deny them an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling. The 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.

To show that a requested accommodation may be necessary, there must be an identifiable relationship, or nexus, between the requested accommodation and the individual's disability.

Example 1: A housing provider has a policy of providing unassigned parking spaces to residents. A resident with a mobility impairment, who is substantially limited in her ability to walk, requests an assigned accessible parking space close to the entrance to her unit as a reasonable accommodation. There are available parking spaces near the entrance to her unit that are accessible, but those spaces are available to all residents on a first come, first served basis. The provider must make an exception to its policy of not providing assigned parking spaces to accommodate this resident.

Example 2: A housing provider has a policy of requiring tenants to come to the rental office in person to pay their rent. A tenant has a mental disability that makes her afraid to leave her unit. Because of her disability, she requests that she be permitted to have a friend mail her rent payment to the rental office as a reasonable accommodation. The provider must make an exception to its payment policy to accommodate this tenant.

Example 3: A housing provider has a "no pets" policy. A tenant who is deaf requests that the provider allow him to keep a dog in his unit as a reasonable accommodation. The tenant explains that the dog is an assistance animal that will alert him to several sounds, including knocks at the door, sounding of the smoke detector, the telephone ringing, and cars coming into the driveway. The housing

provider must make an exception to its “no pets” policy to accommodate this tenant.

7. Are there any instances when a provider can deny a request for a reasonable accommodation without violating the Act?

Yes. A housing provider can deny a request for a reasonable accommodation if the request was not made by or on behalf of a person with a disability or if there is no disability-related need for the accommodation. In addition, a request for a reasonable accommodation may be denied if providing the accommodation is not reasonable – *i.e.*, if it would impose an undue financial and administrative burden on the housing provider or it would fundamentally alter the nature of the provider's operations. The determination of undue financial and administrative burden must be made on a case-by-case basis involving various factors, such as the cost of the requested accommodation, the financial resources of the provider, the benefits that the accommodation would provide to the requester, and the availability of alternative accommodations that would effectively meet the requester's disability-related needs.

When a housing provider refuses a requested accommodation because it is not reasonable, the provider should discuss with the requester whether there is an alternative accommodation that would effectively address the requester's disability-related needs without a fundamental alteration to the provider's operations and without imposing an undue financial and administrative burden. If an alternative accommodation would effectively meet the requester's disability-related needs and is reasonable, the provider must grant it. An interactive process in which the housing provider and the requester discuss the requester's disability-related need for the requested accommodation and possible alternative accommodations is helpful to all concerned because it often results in an effective accommodation for the requester that does not pose an undue financial and administrative burden for the provider.

Example: As a result of a disability, a tenant is physically unable to open the dumpster placed in the parking lot by his housing provider for trash collection. The tenant requests that the housing provider send a maintenance staff person to his apartment on a daily basis to collect his trash and take it to the dumpster. Because the housing development is a small operation with limited financial resources and the maintenance staff are on site only twice per week, it may be an undue financial and administrative burden for the housing provider to grant the requested daily trash pick-up service. Accordingly, the requested accommodation may not be reasonable. If the housing provider denies the requested accommodation as unreasonable, the housing provider should discuss with the tenant whether reasonable accommodations could be provided to meet the tenant's disability-related needs – for instance, placing an open trash collection can in a location that is readily accessible to the tenant so the tenant can dispose of his own trash and the provider's maintenance staff can then transfer the trash to the dumpster when they are on site. Such an accommodation would not involve a

fundamental alteration of the provider's operations and would involve little financial and administrative burden for the provider while accommodating the tenant's disability-related needs.

There may be instances where a provider believes that, while the accommodation requested by an individual is reasonable, there is an alternative accommodation that would be equally effective in meeting the individual's disability-related needs. In such a circumstance, the provider should discuss with the individual if she is willing to accept the alternative accommodation. However, providers should be aware that persons with disabilities typically have the most accurate knowledge about the functional limitations posed by their disability, and an individual is not obligated to accept an alternative accommodation suggested by the provider if she believes it will not meet her needs and her preferred accommodation is reasonable.

8. What is a “fundamental alteration”?

A "fundamental alteration" is a modification that alters the essential nature of a provider's operations.

Example: A tenant has a severe mobility impairment that substantially limits his ability to walk. He asks his housing provider to transport him to the grocery store and assist him with his grocery shopping as a reasonable accommodation to his disability. The provider does not provide any transportation or shopping services for its tenants, so granting this request would require a fundamental alteration in the nature of the provider's operations. The request can be denied, but the provider should discuss with the requester whether there is any alternative accommodation that would effectively meet the requester's disability-related needs without fundamentally altering the nature of its operations, such as reducing the tenant's need to walk long distances by altering its parking policy to allow a volunteer from a local community service organization to park her car close to the tenant's unit so she can transport the tenant to the grocery store and assist him with his shopping.

9. What happens if providing a requested accommodation involves some costs on the part of the housing provider?

Courts have ruled that the Act may require a housing provider to grant a reasonable accommodation that involves costs, so long as the reasonable accommodation does not pose an undue financial and administrative burden and the requested accommodation does not constitute a fundamental alteration of the provider's operations. The financial resources of the provider, the cost of the reasonable accommodation, the benefits to the requester of the requested accommodation, and the availability of other, less expensive alternative accommodations that would effectively meet the applicant or resident's disability-related needs must be considered in determining whether a requested accommodation poses an undue financial and administrative

burden.

10. What happens if no agreement can be reached through the interactive process?

A failure to reach an agreement on an accommodation request is in effect a decision by the provider not to grant the requested accommodation. If the individual who was denied an accommodation files a Fair Housing Act complaint to challenge that decision, then the agency or court receiving the complaint will review the evidence in light of applicable law and decide if the housing provider violated that law. For more information about the complaint process, see question 19 below.

11. May a housing provider charge an extra fee or require an additional deposit from applicants or residents with disabilities as a condition of granting a reasonable accommodation?

No. Housing providers may not require persons with disabilities to pay extra fees or deposits as a condition of receiving a reasonable accommodation.

Example 1: A man who is substantially limited in his ability to walk uses a motorized scooter for mobility purposes. He applies to live in an assisted living facility that has a policy prohibiting the use of motorized vehicles in buildings and elsewhere on the premises. It would be a reasonable accommodation for the facility to make an exception to this policy to permit the man to use his motorized scooter on the premises for mobility purposes. Since allowing the man to use his scooter in the buildings and elsewhere on the premises is a reasonable accommodation, the facility may not condition his use of the scooter on payment of a fee or deposit or on a requirement that he obtain liability insurance relating to the use of the scooter. However, since the Fair Housing Act does not protect any person with a disability who poses a direct threat to the person or property of others, the man must operate his motorized scooter in a responsible manner that does not pose a significant risk to the safety of other persons and does not cause damage to other persons' property. If the individual's use of the scooter causes damage to his unit or the common areas, the housing provider may charge him for the cost of repairing the damage (or deduct it from the standard security deposit imposed on all tenants), if it is the provider's practice to assess tenants for any damage they cause to the premises.

Example 2: Because of his disability, an applicant with a hearing impairment needs to keep an assistance animal in his unit as a reasonable accommodation. The housing provider may not require the applicant to pay a fee or a security deposit as a condition of allowing the applicant to keep the assistance animal. However, if a tenant's assistance animal causes damage to the applicant's unit or the common areas of the dwelling, the housing provider may charge the tenant for

the cost of repairing the damage (or deduct it from the standard security deposit imposed on all tenants), if it is the provider's practice to assess tenants for any damage they cause to the premises.

12. When and how should an individual request an accommodation?

Under the Act, a resident or an applicant for housing makes a reasonable accommodation request whenever she makes clear to the housing provider that she is requesting an exception, change, or adjustment to a rule, policy, practice, or service because of her disability. She should explain what type of accommodation she is requesting and, if the need for the accommodation is not readily apparent or not known to the provider, explain the relationship between the requested accommodation and her disability.

An applicant or resident is not entitled to receive a reasonable accommodation unless she requests one. However, the Fair Housing Act does not require that a request be made in a particular manner or at a particular time. A person with a disability need not personally make the reasonable accommodation request; the request can be made by a family member or someone else who is acting on her behalf. An individual making a reasonable accommodation request does not need to mention the Act or use the words "reasonable accommodation." However, the requester must make the request in a manner that a reasonable person would understand to be a request for an exception, change, or adjustment to a rule, policy, practice, or service because of a disability.

Although a reasonable accommodation request can be made orally or in writing, it is usually helpful for both the resident and the housing provider if the request is made in writing. This will help prevent misunderstandings regarding what is being requested, or whether the request was made. To facilitate the processing and consideration of the request, residents or prospective residents may wish to check with a housing provider in advance to determine if the provider has a preference regarding the manner in which the request is made. However, housing providers must give appropriate consideration to reasonable accommodation requests even if the requester makes the request orally or does not use the provider's preferred forms or procedures for making such requests.

Example: A tenant in a large apartment building makes an oral request that she be assigned a mailbox in a location that she can easily access because of a physical disability that limits her ability to reach and bend. The provider would prefer that the tenant make the accommodation request on a pre-printed form, but the tenant fails to complete the form. The provider must consider the reasonable accommodation request even though the tenant would not use the provider's designated form.

13. Must a housing provider adopt formal procedures for processing requests for a reasonable accommodation?

No. The Act does not require that a housing provider adopt any formal procedures for reasonable accommodation requests. However, having formal procedures may aid individuals with disabilities in making requests for reasonable accommodations and may aid housing providers in assessing those requests so that there are no misunderstandings as to the nature of the request, and, in the event of later disputes, provide records to show that the requests received proper consideration.

A provider may not refuse a request, however, because the individual making the request did not follow any formal procedures that the provider has adopted. If a provider adopts formal procedures for processing reasonable accommodation requests, the provider should ensure that the procedures, including any forms used, do not seek information that is not necessary to evaluate if a reasonable accommodation may be needed to afford a person with a disability equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling. See Questions 16 - 18, which discuss the disability-related information that a provider may and may not request for the purposes of evaluating a reasonable accommodation request.

14. Is a housing provider obligated to provide a reasonable accommodation to a resident or applicant if an accommodation has not been requested?

No. A housing provider is only obligated to provide a reasonable accommodation to a resident or applicant if a request for the accommodation has been made. A provider has notice that a reasonable accommodation request has been made if a person, her family member, or someone acting on her behalf requests a change, exception, or adjustment to a rule, policy, practice, or service because of a disability, even if the words “reasonable accommodation” are not used as part of the request.

15. What if a housing provider fails to act promptly on a reasonable accommodation request?

A provider has an obligation to provide prompt responses to reasonable accommodation requests. An undue delay in responding to a reasonable accommodation request may be deemed to be a failure to provide a reasonable accommodation.

16. What inquiries, if any, may a housing provider make of current or potential residents regarding the existence of a disability when they have not asked for an accommodation?

Under the Fair Housing Act, it is usually unlawful for a housing provider to (1) ask if an applicant for a dwelling has a disability or if a person intending to reside in a dwelling or anyone associated with an applicant or resident has a disability, or (2) ask about the nature or severity of such persons' disabilities. Housing providers may, however, make the following inquiries, provided these inquiries are made of all applicants, including those with and without disabilities:

- An inquiry into an applicant's ability to meet the requirements of tenancy;
- An inquiry to determine if an applicant is a current illegal abuser or addict of a controlled substance;
- An inquiry to determine if an applicant qualifies for a dwelling legally available only to persons with a disability or to persons with a particular type of disability; and
- An inquiry to determine if an applicant qualifies for housing that is legally available on a priority basis to persons with disabilities or to persons with a particular disability.

Example 1: A housing provider offers accessible units to persons with disabilities needing the features of these units on a priority basis. The provider may ask applicants if they have a disability and if, in light of their disability, they will benefit from the features of the units. However, the provider may not ask applicants if they have other types of physical or mental impairments. If the applicant's disability and the need for the accessible features are not readily apparent, the provider may request reliable information/documentation of the disability-related need for an accessible unit.

Example 2: A housing provider operates housing that is legally limited to persons with chronic mental illness. The provider may ask applicants for information needed to determine if they have a mental disability that would qualify them for the housing. However, in this circumstance, the provider may not ask applicants if they have other types of physical or mental impairments. If it is not readily apparent that an applicant has a chronic mental disability, the provider may request reliable information/documentation of the mental disability needed to qualify for the housing.

In some instances, a provider may also request certain information about an applicant's or a resident's disability if the applicant or resident requests a reasonable accommodation. See Questions 17 and 18 below.

17. What kinds of information, if any, may a housing provider request from a person with an obvious or known disability who is requesting a reasonable accommodation?

A provider is entitled to obtain information that is necessary to evaluate if a requested reasonable accommodation may be necessary because of a disability. If a person's disability is obvious, or otherwise known to the provider, and if the need for the requested accommodation is also readily apparent or known, then the provider may not request any additional information

about the requester's disability or the disability-related need for the accommodation.

If the requester's disability is known or readily apparent to the provider, but the need for the accommodation is not readily apparent or known, the provider may request only information that is necessary to evaluate the disability-related need for the accommodation.

Example 1: An applicant with an obvious mobility impairment who regularly uses a walker to move around asks her housing provider to assign her a parking space near the entrance to the building instead of a space located in another part of the parking lot. Since the physical disability (*i.e.*, difficulty walking) and the disability-related need for the requested accommodation are both readily apparent, the provider may not require the applicant to provide any additional information about her disability or the need for the requested accommodation.

Example 2: A rental applicant who uses a wheelchair advises a housing provider that he wishes to keep an assistance dog in his unit even though the provider has a "no pets" policy. The applicant's disability is readily apparent but the need for an assistance animal is not obvious to the provider. The housing provider may ask the applicant to provide information about the disability-related need for the dog.

Example 3: An applicant with an obvious vision impairment requests that the leasing agent provide assistance to her in filling out the rental application form as a reasonable accommodation because of her disability. The housing provider may not require the applicant to document the existence of her vision impairment.

18. If a disability is not obvious, what kinds of information may a housing provider request from the person with a disability in support of a requested accommodation?

A housing provider may not ordinarily inquire as to the nature and severity of an individual's disability (*see* Answer 16, above). However, in response to a request for a reasonable accommodation, a housing provider may request reliable disability-related information that (1) is necessary to verify that the person meets the Act's definition of disability (*i.e.*, has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities), (2) describes the needed accommodation, and (3) shows the relationship between the person's disability and the need for the requested accommodation. Depending on the individual's circumstances, information verifying that the person meets the Act's definition of disability can usually be provided by the individual himself or herself (*e.g.*, proof that an individual under 65 years of age receives Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance benefits¹⁰ or a credible statement by the individual). A doctor or other

¹⁰ Persons who meet the definition of disability for purposes of receiving Supplemental Security Income ("SSI") or Social Security Disability Insurance ("SSDI") benefits in most cases meet the definition of disability under the Fair Housing Act, although the converse may not be true. *See e.g., Cleveland v. Policy Management Systems Corp.*, 526 U.S. 795, 797 (1999)

medical professional, a peer support group, a non-medical service agency, or a reliable third party who is in a position to know about the individual's disability may also provide verification of a disability. In most cases, an individual's medical records or detailed information about the nature of a person's disability is not necessary for this inquiry.

Once a housing provider has established that a person meets the Act's definition of disability, the provider's request for documentation should seek only the information that is necessary to evaluate if the reasonable accommodation is needed because of a disability. Such information must be kept confidential and must not be shared with other persons unless they need the information to make or assess a decision to grant or deny a reasonable accommodation request or unless disclosure is required by law (*e.g.*, a court-issued subpoena requiring disclosure).

19. If a person believes she has been unlawfully denied a reasonable accommodation, what should that person do if she wishes to challenge that denial under the Act?

When a person with a disability believes that she has been subjected to a discriminatory housing practice, including a provider's wrongful denial of a request for reasonable accommodation, she may file a complaint with HUD within one year after the alleged denial or may file a lawsuit in federal district court within two years of the alleged denial. If a complaint is filed with HUD, HUD will investigate the complaint at no cost to the person with a disability.

There are several ways that a person may file a complaint with HUD:

- By placing a toll-free call to 1-800-669-9777 or TTY 1-800-927-9275;
- By completing the "on-line" complaint form available on the HUD internet site: <http://www.hud.gov>; or
- By mailing a completed complaint form or letter to:

Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity
Department of Housing & Urban Development
451 Seventh Street, S.W., Room 5204
Washington, DC 20410-2000

(noting that SSDI provides benefits to a person with a disability so severe that she is unable to do her previous work and cannot engage in any other kind of substantial gainful work whereas a person pursuing an action for disability discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act may state a claim that "with a reasonable accommodation" she could perform the essential functions of the job).

Upon request, HUD will provide printed materials in alternate formats (large print, audio tapes, or Braille) and provide complainants with assistance in reading and completing forms.

The Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department brings lawsuits in federal courts across the country to end discriminatory practices and to seek monetary and other relief for individuals whose rights under the Fair Housing Act have been violated. The Civil Rights Division initiates lawsuits when it has reason to believe that a person or entity is involved in a "pattern or practice" of discrimination or when there has been a denial of rights to a group of persons that raises an issue of general public importance. The Division also participates as *amicus curiae* in federal court cases that raise important legal questions involving the application and/or interpretation of the Act. To alert the Justice Department to matters involving a pattern or practice of discrimination, matters involving the denial of rights to groups of persons, or lawsuits raising issues that may be appropriate for *amicus* participation, contact:

U.S. Department of Justice
Civil Rights Division
Housing and Civil Enforcement Section – G St.
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20530

For more information on the types of housing discrimination cases handled by the Civil Rights Division, please refer to the Housing and Civil Enforcement Section's website at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/housing/hcehome.html>.

A HUD or Department of Justice decision not to proceed with a Fair Housing Act matter does not foreclose private plaintiffs from pursuing a private lawsuit. However, litigation can be an expensive, time-consuming, and uncertain process for all parties. HUD and the Department of Justice encourage parties to Fair Housing Act disputes to explore all reasonable alternatives to litigation, including alternative dispute resolution procedures, such as mediation. HUD attempts to conciliate all Fair Housing Act complaints. In addition, it is the Department of Justice's policy to offer prospective defendants the opportunity to engage in pre-suit settlement negotiations, except in the most unusual circumstances.



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>.