

# Local control of state homes sought

By Suzie Rollins Singer  
staff writer

The Oakland County Board of Commissioners is calling on the Michigan Legislature to give communities greater control over state-sponsored foster care homes.

The resolution, passed unanimously by the 27-member county board, specifically addresses foster care homes for mentally and physically retarded adults. It calls for state programs and statutes to conform to local health,

safety and zoning ordinances. In addition, commissioners request that the state provide compensation for property owners living in the immediate vicinity of group homes for partial loss of their property values. It does not determine the amount.

"IT'S WRONG to put the mentally ill in communities," said Commissioner Joseph Montante, R-Orchard Lake.

"There's also nothing in the law that addresses deed restrictions, and there's

no local control of licensing," Montante added.

Under a 1977 state law, the state Department of Social Services was empowered to license homes in residential neighborhoods for use as foster care facilities for retarded adults.

State law supersedes local deed restrictions and zoning ordinances. In a licensed home, a licensed operator — either an independent or one affiliated with the Department of Social Services — administers the home. They are monitored by Department of Mental Health representatives.

When a house is targeted as a foster home, the state sends a letter informing the local officials of the impending opening. Often the agency voluntarily holds a public hearing, inviting residents to hear about the new operation.

SOME COUNTY commissioners contend that foster care homes are popping up all over communities and angering local lawmakers.

**'It's wrong to put the mentally ill in communities.'**

— Joseph Montante,  
Oakland County  
commissioner

One point in their resolution asks the state not to "over-concentrate" areas with homes. Presently, the only regulation is that facilities cannot be within 1,500 feet of one another, and if the city's population is more than one million, the distance is 3,000 feet.

"Some of the over-concentration occurs because there are many unlicensed homes in areas, and we addressed that concern quite strongly in the resolution," said Commissioner Mariyan Gosling, R-Bloomfield Hills.

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