

Boarding Home Business

30 boarders - \$600.00 each = \$18,000.00/month

Images

Full Coverage: TASTEFUL, SPACIOUS LIVING IN THE VALLEY!! MOVE IN WITH... Page 1 of 3

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THIS WEEK'S PICKS
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ORGANIZING THE NEWS

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Full Coverage

TASTEFUL, SPACIOUS LIVING IN THE VALLEY!! MOVE IN WITH ONLY 320.00!! (Granada Hills) \$320

crsiglist.org Apr 1, 2009

Story Timeline: 196 days

News in Map

socialhousing@gmail.com | 818-322-4619 Rinaldi and Zelzah, Granada Hills, CA
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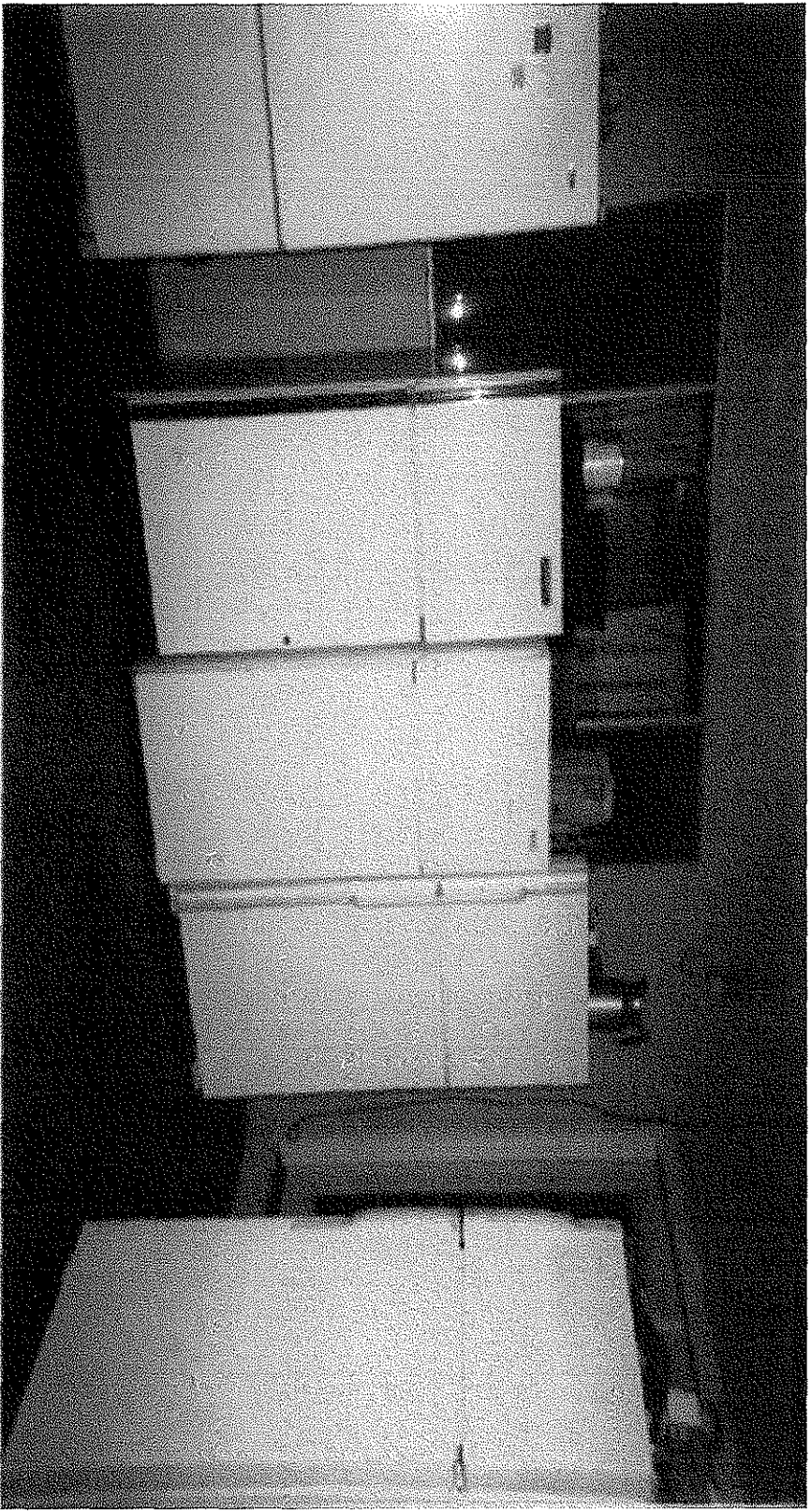
Regions
Valencian

Date: 3-29-11
Submitted in: PUM Committee
Council-File-No: 11-0262
Item No.:
Deputy: public

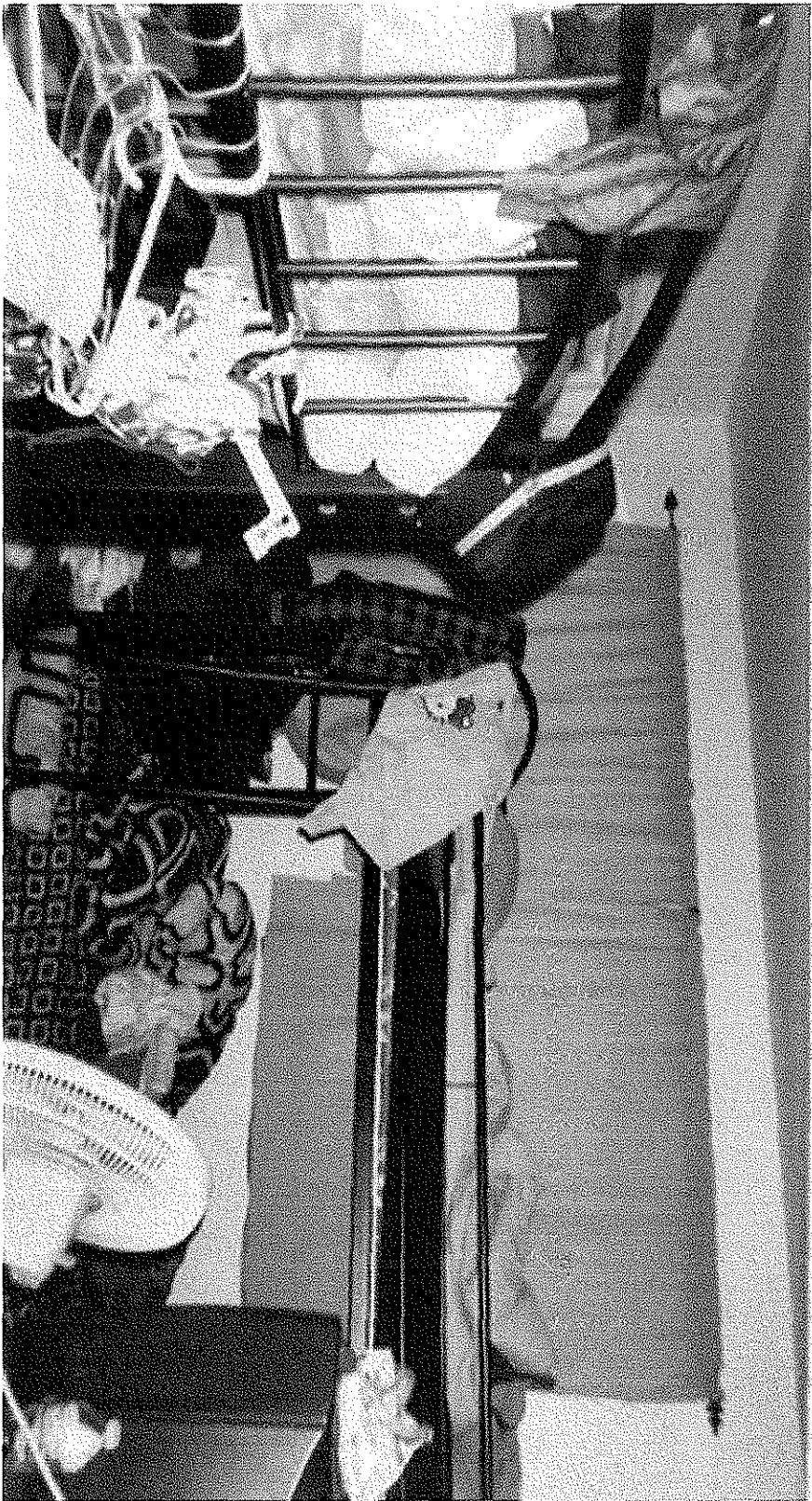
Boarding Home in Granada Hills



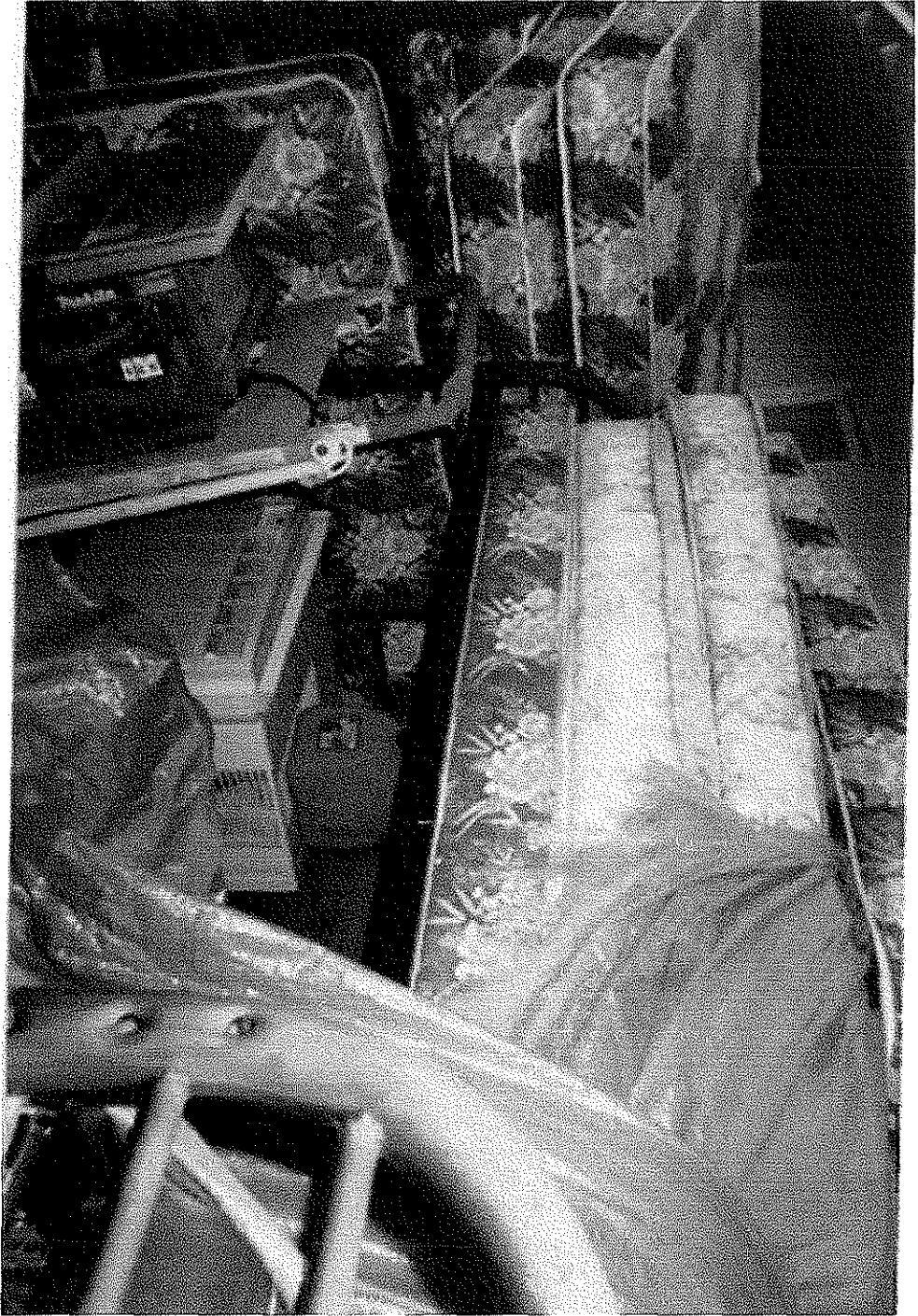
Boarding Home in Granada Hills



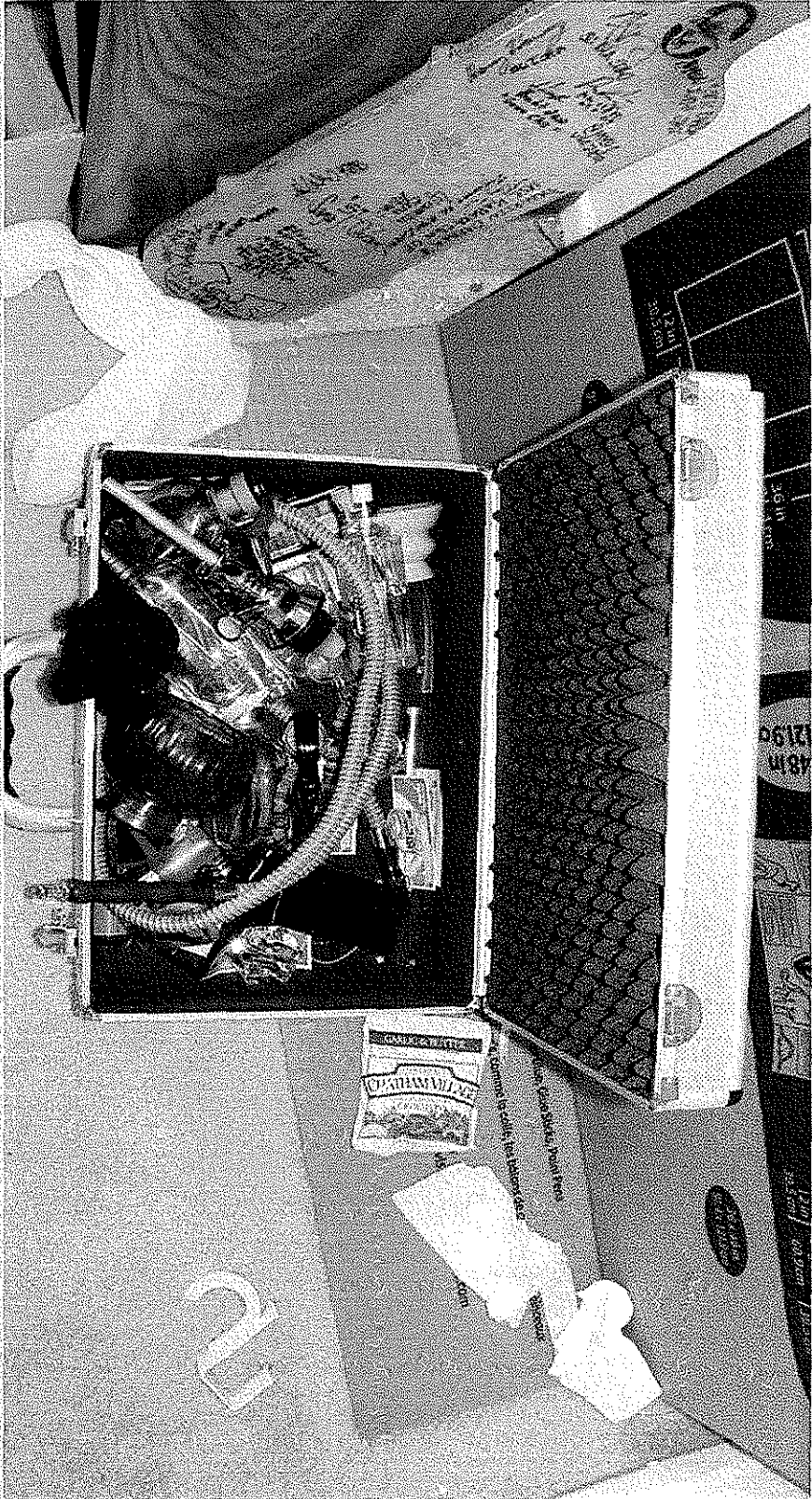
Boarding Home in Granada Hills



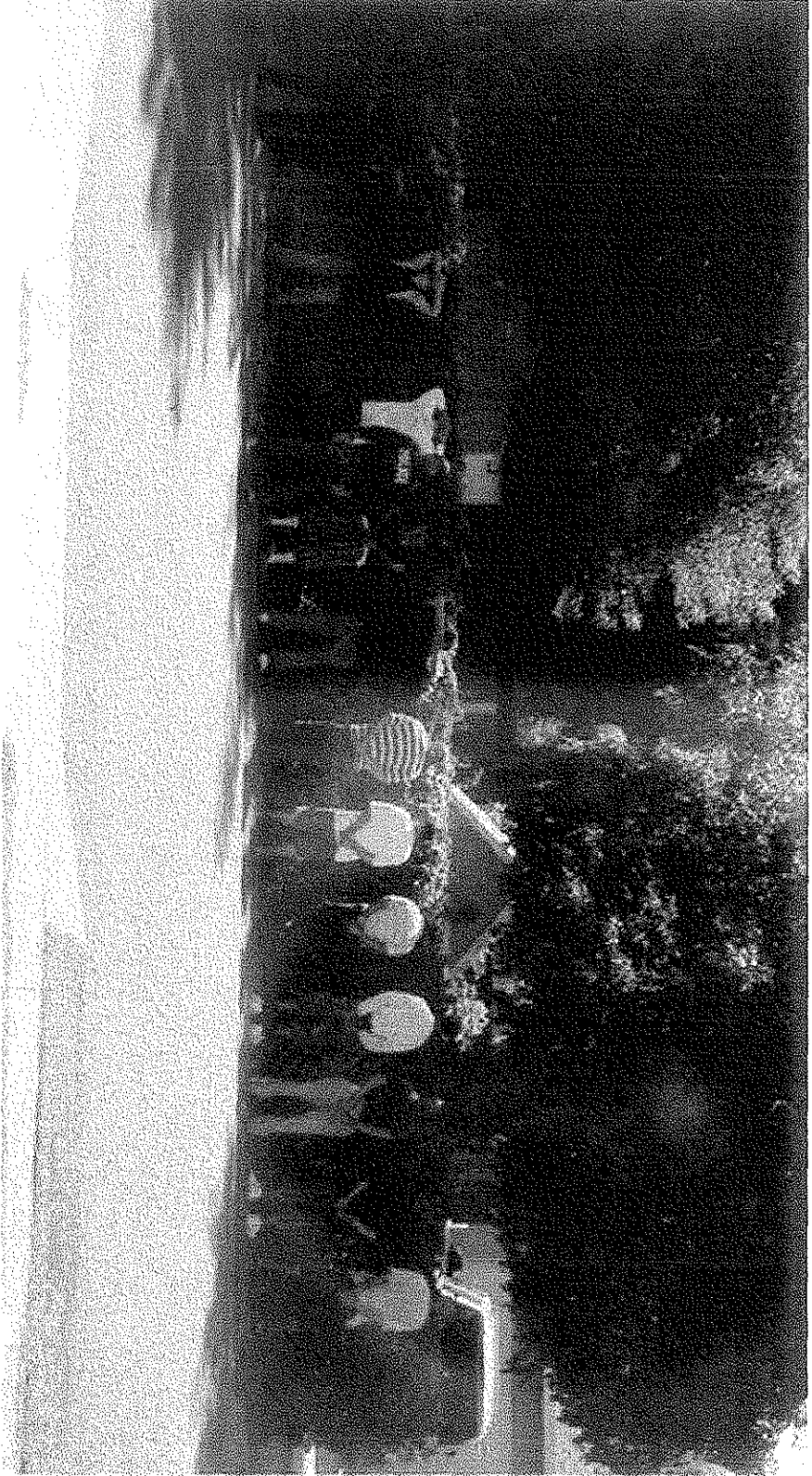
Boarding Home in Granada Hills



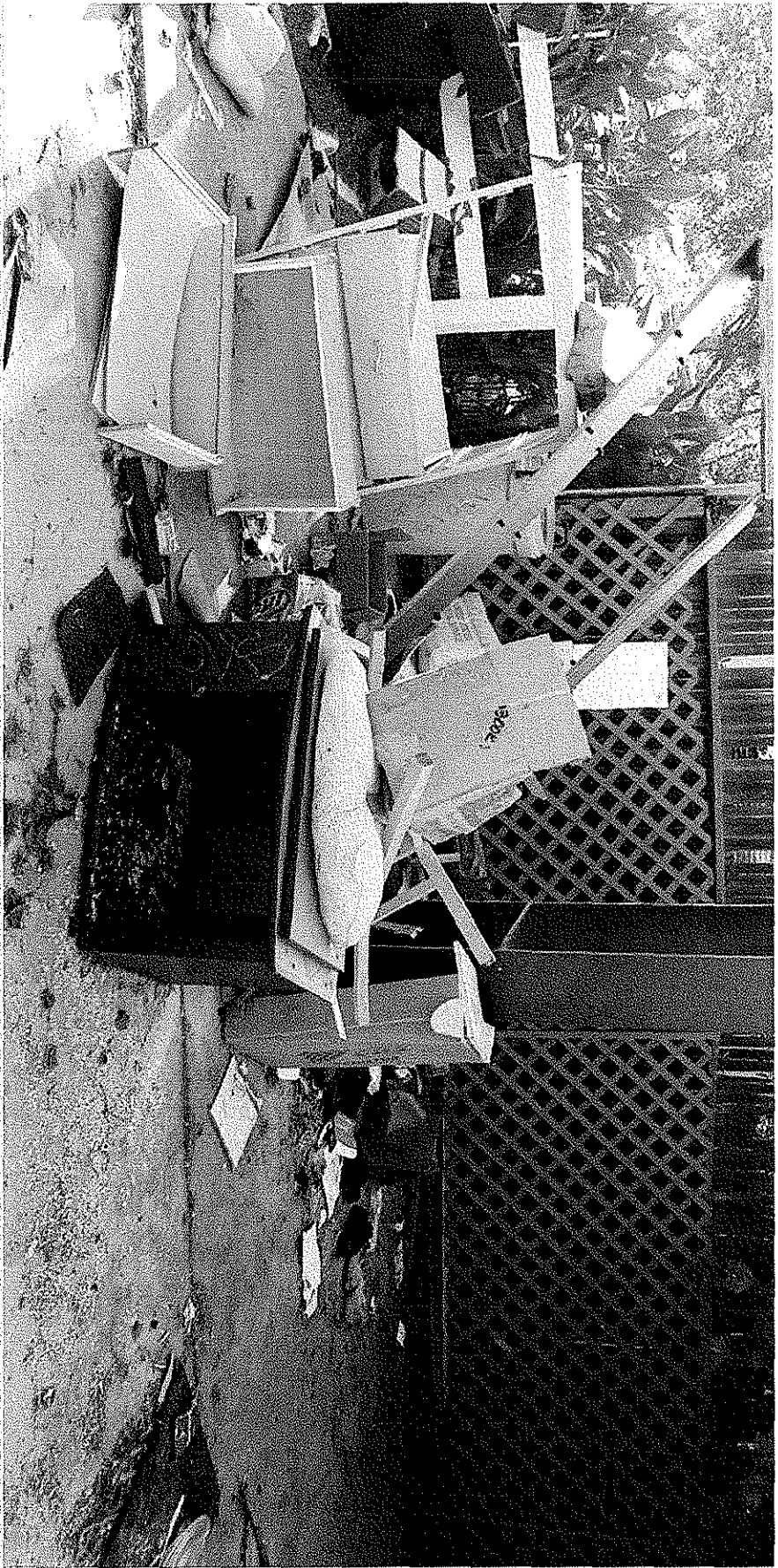
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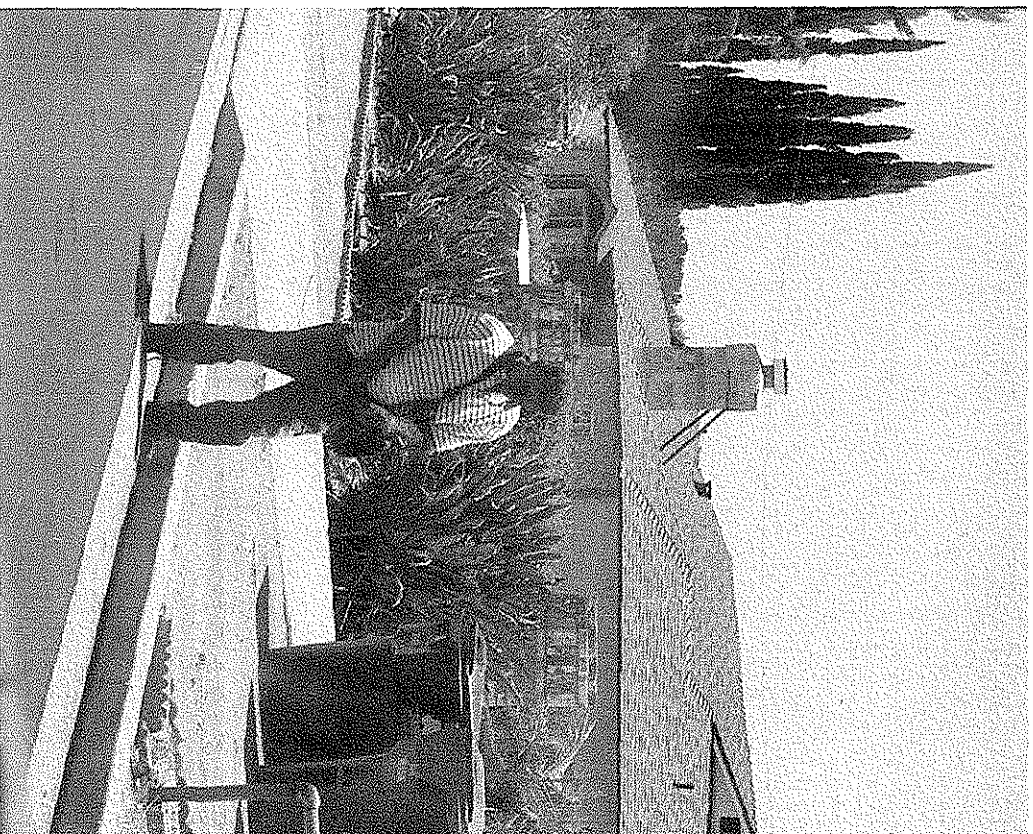
Boarding Home in Northridge



Boarding Home in Granada Hills



Sober Living Home Resident



OGHRG Resolution
3/11



March 27, 2011

Councilmember Ed P. Reyes, Chair
Planning and Land Use Management Committee
Los Angeles City Hall
200 N. Spring Street, Room 410
Los Angeles, California 90012

Case No: CPC-2009-800-CA
CEQA: ENV-2009-801-ND
CF# 07-3427 (October 14, 2010)
CF# 11-0262 (February 16, 2011)

Dear Ed P. Reyes:

The Los Angeles Dept of City Planning prepared a Supplemental Report (to the proposed Community Care Facility Ordinance) released January 28, 2011. The Old Granada Hills Residents' Group wishes to challenge the following recommendation within this Report:

Removal of sections of the proposed ordinance that pertain to Correctional and Penal Institutions and Group Homes for Parolees and Probationers.

The State of California recently passed a law allowing early release from prison to reduce the prison population. This desperate move may jeopardize public safety and security. There are plans to release tens of thousands of prisoners. Many of them have nowhere to go and will undoubtedly seek housing in already overburdened group or halfway houses. In recent years, communities across the City have witnessed an exponential growth of group/sober living houses. Many of these facilities are currently housing large numbers of parolees and probationers. This is a volatile situation that is dangerous for those living in these houses as well as for the surrounding community. Other cities (Riverside, San Bernardino, Orange, Colton, Fontana, Loma Linda, Murrieta) are either considering new ordinances or have enacted ordinances regulating parolee/probationer houses. The City of Los Angeles must do the same. It is unacceptable to bring hardened criminals to our doorsteps. Therefore, we strongly urge you to resubmit sections of the proposed ordinance that pertain to Correctional and Penal Institutions and Group Home for Parolees and Probationers, that include the following suggested definitions and modifications:

Parolee – An individual who has been convicted of a crime and has been released prior to the expiration of that person's term of imprisonment, subject to both the supervision of correctional authorities during the remainder of the term and a resumption of the imprisonment upon violation of the conditions imposed.


Probationer – An individual who has been convicted of a crime and who has been released from prison provided he/she maintains good behavior. He/she may have some freedom to reenter society subject to the supervision and discretion of correctional authorities.

Correctional or Penal Institutions Are Prohibited From Utilizing a Conditional Use Permit In Order to Locate In Residential Zones: Prohibit Correctional or Penal Institutions in residential districts zoned one-family dwelling (that include A1, RA, RS, RE9,11,15,20,40, R1, RD 1.5, 2,3,4,5,6). Probationers shall be limited to no more than 1 in Community Care Facilities serving 7 or more residents. Parolees shall be housed in Correctional or Penal institutions that are under the auspices of California State Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. These facilities shall maintain 24 hour/day on site supervision, by safety or correctional officials.

It is wholly inconsistent with the nature of residential zones to allow prisons, jails, halfway houses and group parolee homes to operate within them under a conditional use permit or otherwise.

Thank You for Your Consideration,


Dave Beauvais, President
Old Granada Hills Residents' Group


Maria Fisk, Chair
OGHRG Zoning and Density Committee

CC: Greig Smith, Councilmember; Jose Huizar, Councilmember; Paul Krekorian, Councilmember

Motion to Amend the Proposed Community Care Facility Ordinance

Whereas, the City of Los Angeles has determined that it is necessary to modify the Los Angeles Municipal Code's ("LAMC")'s existing definitions of *family* and *boarding/rooming houses*, and adding the definition of *single housekeeping unit*, as a way to provide effective tools for the City to enforce its zoning laws with respect to transient types of group homes operating in single family neighborhoods.

Whereas, the City of Los Angeles has proposed amending Sections 12.03, 12.05, 12.07, 12.07.01, 12.07.1, 12.08, 12.08.1, 12.08.3, 12.08.5, 12.09.1, 12.09.5, 12.10, 12.12, 12.12.2, 12.21, 12.22, 12.24, and 14.00 of the LAMC to add definitions of *Community Care Facility*, *Residential Care Facility for the Elderly*, and *Alcoholism or Drug Abuse Recovery or Treatment Facility* to the LAMC to bring it into conformance with the California Community Care Facilities Act. As mandated by State law, the ordinance permits these State licensed facilities with six or fewer residents in any zone that permits single-family homes. It also permits those with seven or more residents as public benefits, requiring performance standards. The proposed ordinance also amends the definitions of *Boarding or Rooming House and Family* to provide clear guidelines for the appropriate enforcement of boarding homes with transient characteristics and prohibits *Boarding or Rooming Houses* in one-family dwellings zoned RD. Lastly, it adds a definition for *Correctional or Penal Institution* to ensure that group homes for parolees are classified as conditional uses.

Whereas, the community of Old Granada Hills recognizes that overcrowded living conditions are inhumane. These types of substandard living conditions promote crime, assaults, abuse, rape, and exacerbate disabilities whether they are physical, psychological or addictive in nature.

Whereas, the community of Old Granada Hills has been subjected to the negative impacts (associated crime and strain on city services, infrastructure, environment) of illegal boarding/rooming houses in residential districts zoned one- family dwelling.

Whereas, the community of Old Granada Hills wishes to preserve the safety, health, welfare and character of residential districts zoned one-family dwelling (that include A1, RA, RS, RE9,11,15,20,40, R1, RD 1.5, 2,3,4,5,6).

Therefore, be it resolved that the Old Granada Hills Resident's Group requests the Community Care Facilities Ordinance be amended to include the following provisions:

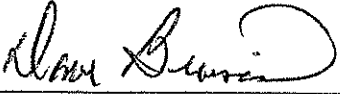
1. All Community Care Facilities Must be Licensed. The proposed Ordinance must clearly state that there shall be:
 - (a) No unlicensed facilities serving 6 or fewer residents.
 - (b) No unlicensed Community Care Facilities serving 7 or more residents.

Any group home, group living arrangement or residential facility that houses and/or provides care or supervision for the elderly, children, homeless, physically handicapped, disabled, shall be licensed by the State of California's Department of Social Services or California Department of Alcohol, or other State agency given the explicit authority to do so. *Under the auspices of aforementioned regulatory agencies the number of operators, quality of operators, approved fire clearances, local building use permits, on-site inspections and reviews, and health safety standards can be more effectively monitored and assured.*

2. Licensed Community Care Facilities Serving 7 or more residents shall require a Conditional Use Permit and Public Hearing in the one family dwellings (designated A, R) and C zones. *As written, the proposed Ordinance utilizes a "ministerial process" that does not require a public hearing or letter of determination. The fundamental principles of fairness and due process require that the City provide impacted communities the opportunity to be heard when a licensed Community Care Facilities serving 7 or more Residents is seeking to locate in the immediate area. No effective cap on occupancy has*


been established. Allowances that offer housing for an unlimited number of individuals (even if facilities are licensed) do not meet "Public Benefits" standards. Overcrowding puts individuals living under such conditions at an increased risk of abuse, violence, assault and rape. Not only is this a disservice to residents living under such conditions, but negatively impacts the surrounding community as well.

3. Concentration: Licensed Community Care Facilities serving 7 or more residents shall be located more than 1,000 feet from each other and 2,000 feet from schools, places of worship, and youth centers. *Over-concentration creates problems with parking, noise and incompatibility with the character and quality of residential neighborhoods.*
4. Add a Clear Definition of Parolee and Probationer
5. Correctional or Penal Institutions Are Prohibited From Utilizing a Conditional Use Permit In Order to Locate In Residential Zones: Prohibit Correctional or Penal Institutions in residential districts zoned one-family dwelling (that include A1, RA, RS, RE9,11,15,20,40, R1, RD 1.5, 2,3,4,5,6). Probationers shall be limited to no more than 1 in Community Care Facilities serving 7 or more residents. Parolees shall be housed in Correctional or Penal institutions that are under the auspices of California State Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. *It is wholly inconsistent with the nature of low zoned residential neighborhoods to allow prisons, jails, halfway houses and group parolee homes to operate within them under a conditional use permit or otherwise.*
6. No Grand-Fathering of Existing Facilities: It must be clearly stated that any existing unlicensed or illegally licensed community care facilities, illegally operating boarding/rooming houses/group homes/parolee homes shall be immediately abated upon enactment of this ordinance. Fine for violations shall be established at \$1,000/day/each resident or tenant.
7. Lease Agreement: A lease must be effectively defined and clarified in order to prevent more than one tenant to sign under an agreement such as a Master Lease or non-concurrent lease times.
8. Occupancy: Living, Family, Dining Rooms, Kitchens, Bathrooms, Hallways, Garages, Utility Rooms, Stairwells are not considered Sleeping Rooms. Bedrooms and Guest Rooms shall be considered Sleeping Rooms and limited to 2 Residents for every Bedroom or Guest Room. *Therefore Sleeping Rooms determine and set limits for occupancy.*
9. For Purposes of Clarification: Include a Land Use Regulations chart or table that clearly specifies permitted and non permitted uses.



Dave Beauvais, President
Old Granada Hills Residents' Group

Date: 10/9/10



Maria Fisk, Zoning and Density Committee
Old Granada Hills Residents' Group

Date: 10/9/10

March 22, 2010

Councilmember Ed P. Reyes, Chair
Planning and Land Use Management Committee
Los Angeles City Hall
200 N. Spring Street, Room 410
Los Angeles, California 90012

Case No: CPC-2009-800-CA
CEQA: ENV-2009-801-ND
Council File: 07-3427

Crime

Dear Ed P. Reyes:

Over the past several years the communities of Old Granada Hills and North Hills have been seriously impacted by several group houses within their residential districts. Surrounding neighbors have endured a steady stream of criminal activity and nuisances associated with the houses. For starters, you are being provided with a summary of incidents related to 4 group houses (2 boarding/lodging and 2 Sober Living). The information below was obtained from:

1. A community website thread & photos forwarded from nearby neighbors
2. LADBS and other official websites
3. Written reports and statements from LAPD Senior Lead Officers, LAPD Captain, LAFD Department Captain, Paramedics and City Attorney

2 group houses (17420 Lahey St, 17801 Donmetz St) and 1 sober living house (17535 Horace St) in Old Granada Hills. Summary of information and incidents for all three:

- 21 calls to LADBS for code violations in approx 2 yrs
- 85 calls to LAFD/Paramedics x 3 yrs
- 3 arrests (1 felony) another felony investigation pending
- 48 calls to LAPD x 2 yrs
- Bomb squad deployment
- 2 large parties (100-300 individuals) resulting in one arrest
- multiple ads on craigslist & myprisonspace. Rents were advertised for \$600.00/mo. "Room" was a bunk-bed space.
- 13-30 tenants (some with criminal backgrounds - police investigations for parole violations)
- On going nuisance abatement proceedings that ultimately proved to be ineffective
- Foreclosure proceedings initiated on one house. Owner is incarcerated and running business from prison.
- 1 home shut down & residents evicted (squatters). Drug paraphernalia & marijuana plants found inside house.

Sober Living Network house (15649 Chase St) North Hills :

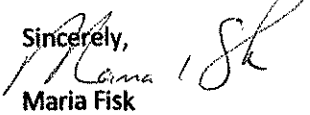
- 3 calls to LADBS for code violations x 4 yrs
- >80 calls to LAPD for service in over 2 yrs
- 30-47 residents, including upwards of 15-19 parolees or probationers (contracts with Dept. of Corrections)
- Ads on website. "Rooms" advertised for \$900/mo.
- On going nuisance abatement proceedings that ultimately proved to be ineffective
- Facility was recently closed after years of community and safety official pressures

Even though operators of these houses profess that they are transitioning individuals with disabilities into mainstream society, there are no studies/data to support their claims. Common sense would dictate "how effective is any type of support or supervision with upwards of 30 individuals living together in one house?" While operators of group houses are profiting (\$18,000-42,000/month), others are paying a steep price. Surrounding neighbors are now much less safe and secure. Residents who are housed in these facilities are subjected to crime, violence and abuse. Their government subsidies are being wasted and misspent. Also, tens of thousands of tax dollars are spent on deploying a steady stream of fire, police, code enforcement,

health department, and other city officials to investigate violations and criminal activities. These types of facilities, operating as Boarding/Rooming houses have always been considered an incompatible use within areas zoned one family. Although our current zoning codes are somewhat vague, the proposed ordinance clarifies the ambiguities. Other cities (Murrieta, San Diego, Pasadena, Orange, etc.) have recently enacted effective similar ordinances and it is my sincere hope that Los Angeles will do the same.

Therefore, I strongly urge you to support the proposed Community Care Facility Ordinance!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maria Fisk', is written over the typed name.

Maria Fisk

For information Purposes:

Old Granada Hills Residents' Group, Board of Directors, member
OGHRG Zoning and Density Committee, chair
Granada Hills South Neighborhood Council, Land Use Committee, member
Granada Hills Specific Plan, Design Review Board, member
Neighborhood Watch

Cc: Greig Smith, Councilmember; Paul Krekorian, Councilmember; Paul Koretz, Councilmember

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AA/NA/CA TWELVE STEP MEETINGS ON SITE ♦ FUN SOBER ACTIVITIES

www.CommunitySoberLiving.org

Proud Member Los Angeles County Sober Living Coalition
California Association of Addiction Recovery Resources

March 24, 2011

Councilmember Ed P. Reyes, Chair
 Planning and Land Use Management Committee
 Los Angeles City Hall
 200 N Spring Street, Room 410
 Los Angeles CA 90012

Re: Case No. CPC-2009-800-CA
 CEQA: ENV-2009-801-ND
 CF: 07-3427

Dear Ed P. Reyes:

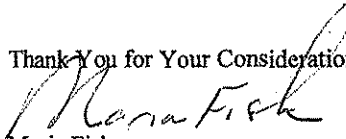
Alcohol abuse and drug addiction have been labeled diseases by the American Medical Association and by many other prominent healthcare organizations (1, 2, 3). Unlike other diseases, addiction is more complex, it is a condition caused by persistent changes in brain structure resulting in a form of a compulsive disorder. Substance abuse is not only associated with crime, social and economic burdens but other debilitating health conditions (liver/heart/kidney diseases, mental illness, infections, hepatitis, TB, sexually transmitted diseases, etc). The objectives of addiction treatment are to help the individual stop using drugs, maintain a drug-free lifestyle, achieve productive functioning in the family, at work, and in society. Additionally, the diseases associated with substance abuse must somehow be addressed and dealt with.

There are diverse approaches and options to managing substance abuse, including: outpatient treatment (AA, private physicians & therapists); inpatient treatment (hospitals, clinics and licensed residential detox/treatment facilities); and unlicensed transitional sober living homes. Some of the aforementioned treatment and support measures are generally recognized as safe and effective, but others may not be. As a health care professional, I am specifically concerned about a rapidly growing unregulated industry that is attempting to offer support to persons recovering from substance abuse in residential settings. There is no effective mechanism in place for tracking, identifying or monitoring all unlicensed facilities. Coalitions and networks claim to do so, but apparently lack the proper tools required to effectively manage facilities under their jurisdiction. Knowing this raises serious questions that must be answered and resolved:

- How is overall safety and effectiveness being assured and monitored - are coalitions and networks qualified to self-regulate
- How do patients determine which facilities are legitimate and have some degree of oversight
- Are house managers screened for prior experience, applicable degrees, criminal background
- Are patients screened for criminal backgrounds, disabilities, health issues and communicable diseases
- How are diseases that co-occur with substance abuse dealt with
- What are the precautions taken to prevent the spread of communicable diseases
- Are residents truly disabled - if they continue to abuse then they are no longer considered disabled (4)
- Is drug testing administered on a routine basis - how are positive results handled
- What actions are taken if patients refuse to take prescribed medications, refuse to seek outside supportive treatment (AA), or continue to abuse substances
- Is treatment being offered - unlicensed facilities are not allowed to do so (5)
- Are standards of support and best practices instituted uniformly
- Are house rules fair and humane
- How are rape, assaults, abuse, theft and other crimes dealt with
- Are residences modified to accommodate those with physical disabilities
- Are facilities inspected for fire safety, building code compliance, sanitation, vermin infestation - are they in compliance
- Are LADBS, Safety Officers and other governmental officials freely allowed to inspect premises
- Why is overcrowding allowed to persist - For example, upwards of 30-47 individuals were crowded into a Sober Living house in North Hills.
- How can one manager effectively supervise a large group of individuals living together 24 hrs/day

Even though some sober living homes may have beneficial outcomes, what about the industry as a whole? Where are the large scale studies that demonstrate that unregulated sober living homes are more successful than other treatment modalities? Research indicates that more definitive studies are needed (6, 7, 8, 9). If many sober living homes fly under the radar of detection and cannot be located, then how can they be evaluated for their outcomes and performance? Furthermore how can they be monitored for overall accountability and safety? By not intervening are we, as a city actually putting vulnerable individuals in harms way and contributing to their ongoing addiction and criminal activities? With little or no oversight, unscrupulous operators could be profiting at the expense of the vulnerable. This out-of-control industry must be reined in. Any facility where homeless, substance abusers/those recovering from substance abuse, physically or mentally disabled are living together (whether they receive treatment or not) must be closely supervised, regulated and State licensed. Otherwise there will be no safeguards in place to protect occupants or patients residing within these residential facilities.

Thank You for Your Consideration,



Maria Fisk

Maria Fisk

For information purposes:

Certified Diabetes Educator, Registered Dietitian

Member of:

Old Granada Hills Resident's Group, Board of Directors

OGHRG Zoning and Density Committee, Chair

Granada Hills South Neighborhood Council, Planning and Land Use Committee

Granada Hills Specific Plan Design Review Board

Neighborhood Watch

References:

1. JAMA. 1992;268(8):1012-1014.
2. J Am Med Assoc. 1957;165(13):1707-1713
3. AMA Policy H95.983 Drug Dependency as Disease
4. Joint statement of DOJ and HUD. Group Homes, Local Land Use, & the Fair Housing Act
5. California Department of Alcohol & Drug Programs
6. National Institute on Drug Abuse: Treatment approaches for Drug Addiction
7. National Institute on Drug Abuse, naturalistic studies DARP, TOPS, DATOS
8. Polcin DL, Sober living houses for alcohol drug dependence: J Subst Abuse Treat. 2010 Jun; 38 (4): 356-65.
9. Evaluation of the California Outcomes Measurement System

Cc: Jose Huizar, Councilmember; Paul Krekorian, Councilmember

Los Angeles Times | LOCAL

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Home Abuse

L.A. NOW

From the metro staff of the Los Angeles Times and...

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Mentally ill and elderly people held in squalid chicken coops, authorities say

September 4, 2009 | 11:44 pm

(0) (23) Comments (18)



San Bernardino authorities arrested a woman Friday who they say boarded 22 mentally ill, elderly and other people in prison-like conditions, housing some in converted chicken coops behind razor wire fences.

Pensri Sophar Dalton, 61, was arrested on 16 counts of suspected elder abuse, according to City Atty. James F. Penman. Some of the people appeared to have mental health issues, he said.

"The stench was pretty horrific," Penman said. "These were very squalid conditions."

The people were being held in dilapidated buildings, some without running water or toilets. The facility is not licensed with the state or the city, Penman said. Two milk box crates containing prescription medicines were found at the site. At least two of the residents were in wheelchairs.

Police arrested Dalton after going to her home in the 2800 block of North Golden Avenue to arrest a man with outstanding warrants for drunk driving, according Penman said.

Penman said that while some residents were held in converted chicken coops, others lived in shared bedrooms, the doors of which had padlocks on them. Residents ate on two picnic tables beneath a metal roof outside on a dirt floor.

Two residents were taken to Arrowhead Regional Medical Center in Colton.

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About L.A. Now

L.A. Now is the Los Angeles Times' breaking news section for Southern California. It is produced by more than 80 reporters and editors in the Times' Metro section, reporting from the paper's

San Bernardino group home 'felt like a prison'

The unlicensed facility, whose owner was arrested for alleged elder abuse, housed patients in converted chicken coops and smelled of urine. The city attorney is investigating.

September 06, 2009 | David Kelly

SAN BERNARDINO — Shortly after moving into a group home here six months ago, Trevor Castro said, he began to feel less like a paying tenant and more like a prisoner.

The bleak compound was surrounded by a cinder-block wall topped with coils of jagged razor wire. He lived in a converted chicken coop with no plumbing and a bucket for a toilet. He said he was kicked, had a glass broken on his face by a staff member and had cans of cigarette butts dumped on him.

On Friday, police came looking for 23-year-old Castro for an outstanding DUI warrant and saw a bucket of urine outside his door.

"Once they started looking around, that was it," he said as he and neighbors gathered outside the home Saturday.

The scale of the squalor, the smell, the filth and the reported abuse of the 22 elderly and mentally ill people living at the North Golden Avenue property led to the arrest of owner Pensri Sophar Dalton, 61, on 16 felony counts of suspected elder abuse.

The woman residents called "Mama Sophar" also faces a host of civil penalties, including running an unlicensed board-and-care facility, one in which medications were stored in empty milk cartons. The tenants were moved to other facilities and two were hospitalized.

A staff member at the house refused to comment Saturday and said Dalton would speak only if her lawyer were present. The day before, a worker had doused reporters with a hose.

Another board-and-care home run by Dalton was closed a few years ago because of code violations, but she operates others. Castro said he had lived in two of her houses. Public records show she has 13 different addresses, including eight in San Bernardino, two in Highland, two in Redlands and one in Los Angeles.

"This is probably the tip of the iceberg," said City Atty. James Penman, who said Saturday that local and state agencies will be investigating the case.

Still, the discovery of the house is not unusual and neither is the squalor. Unlicensed group homes are relatively common in San Bernardino.

"San Bernardino has a good deal of cheap housing, and people who are unscrupulous have bought a fair amount of those houses and turned them into these facilities, and we come across them by accident," Penman said. "This is among the worst I've seen, but I have seen worse."

The compound, which sits on a residential street, has three brown, 20-foot-by-40-foot converted chicken coops with five bedrooms each.

News Archives

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Fri, Dec 05, 1997

Ventura County Star

November 30, 1997

Abuses tarnish group homes in California

Horror stories: Documentation of deaths, abuse and poor care mount

By Alice Warchol

Staff Writer

Donald Privitera moved into an Oxnard group home for the disabled. Four months later he was dead. Employees didn't follow doctor's orders to buy him a helmet. Repeated falls killed him.

Paul Isom, a 14-year-old boy in a San Diego group home, died from a punctured colon. The boy was so disabled he couldn't speak. Employees didn't recognize his distress and never sought medical aid.

In a Bakersfield group home, a retarded 23-year-old man with a broken leg went five days before seeing a doctor. With his leg finally in a cast, he developed a three-inch sore that went untreated for two months.

As California shuttles developmentally disabled people from institutions into cheaper group homes, such stories have become more common.

People who need medication aren't always getting it. People who need skilled supervision are being cared for by untrained workers. People who are vulnerable to infection have difficulty reaching a doctor.

Staff members have no medical training and work for little more than minimum wage. Citations from state agencies stack up, but penalties are often light.

Prompted by the settlement of a lawsuit in 1994, the state has transferred 2,000 developmentally disabled into the privately run homes. The suit was brought by parents unhappy with large institutions, but critics say they didn't anticipate that homelike settings in the community could be worse.

The institutions had their shortcomings, but residents had easy access to medical professionals. At group homes, that's not always the case.

"You don't have to have one day of training," said Francine Isom, the mother of the 14-year-old who died. "You can walk into a home and you don't have to speak English."

Angry parents say a University of California, Riverside, study proves the homes' inherent danger. According to the research, people in group homes have a 72 percent greater risk of dying than those in developmental centers.

State officials have produced their own study and, they say, the risk is only slightly higher. Also, the state has hired a consulting firm to investigate the death rates.

Until October, Dennis Amundson headed the state Department of Developmental Services. He said California's system is the nation's best because it guarantees services for all who qualify.

Amundson acknowledged it could use more staff and more money. "We should be paying people who care for people with developmental disabilities a lot more than they can make by working at McDonald's," he said.

But, he said, the system can never eradicate the kind of physical and sexual abuses that have been documented statewide. In one case, at an Oxnard group home in January 1996, a new employee raped a patient in her 70s.

"Bad things happen to good people," he said. "They happen in large institutions. They happen in group homes. They happen to people who live in their own apartments. ... I am not sure there's any simple answer to that problem."

But critics say patient care is being jeopardized just so the state can save money. The closure of Camarillo State Hospital and Developmental Center in June will eventually save the state \$18.5 million yearly.

Other efforts are being made to tackle some of the problems critics have found in group homes.

This year's state budget calls for regional centers to hire additional staff to monitor patients coming out of institutions who have complex medical problems. Regional center employees will also have to make sure they have face-to-face contact with these patients every three months.

But to really improve the system, group homes need more money, said Schaeffer, who works for Tri-Counties Regional Center.

"It's really unfair to simply evaluate the quality of service and monitor more closely if service providers cannot afford to improve the quality of their care."

The state has hired an independent consulting firm for \$500,000 to investigate whether group home clients have a higher death rate than people in institutions -- as suggested by UC Riverside researchers. In addition, the review will address accusations that state officials coerced people into leaving developmental centers for group homes.

Whatever the investigation reveals, society needs to consider how it is caring for the developmentally disabled, said Jim Shorter, executive director of the Tri-Counties Regional Center.

"The population of people that we serve is ultimately the test of civilization," Shorter said. "Everyone, whether they have families who are developmentally disabled, needs to ask themselves 'How are we showing that we are a humane culture, by protecting the most vulnerable people?' "

CAPT | 1220 S Street, Suite 100, Sacramento CA 95811-7138 USA | (916) 329-9140 | (800) 677-2278

