

Disability Rights Texas Presentation to City of Austin Human Rights Commission

February 24, 2014

Actionable Recommendations to the City of Austin Human Rights Commission:

- 1) We ask that the Human Rights Commission monitor the proposed regulations around the number of non-related people in a home. We would like to remind the relevant individuals at the City of Austin that these types of regulations could negatively impact those with disabilities who live in group homes or use live in attendants. For many individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, group homes are an integrated, residential option and the only alternative to large institutions. At this time, Disability Rights Texas takes no position on these so-called stealth dorms or their regulation, but we ask that the City do what it can to address the potential impact that these regulations may have on individuals with disabilities living in group homes or those who require live in attendants. Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities continue to fight for the right to live in a neighborhood, residential setting and we are concerned about how these regulations could impact them.
- 2) We also are interested in seeing the City of Austin undertake a survey, study, or policy statement regarding the way accessibility features interact or conflict with COA regulations (these may include zoning requirements, overlays, impervious cover restrictions, etc). As an example, something that may increase the visitability or accessibility of a home, such as a wider driveway, may be prohibited by some other COA regulation. It would be helpful for the City to look at how these issues intersect and to develop a policy on dealing with potential conflicts. Those who wish to make their home more accessible for themselves or visitors may be prevented from doing so in order to comply with other COA regulations. We would ask that the City provide guidance on this issue.
- 3) We suggest that the Human Rights Commission or City of Austin conduct surveys or focus groups of specific groups to learn about accessibility issues in daily paths of travel. In particular, we believe it would be useful to reach out to groups who may have communication barriers that prevent them from reaching out to the City on their own. This includes individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and individuals who are blind or have visual impairments. In doing so, we believe the City would learn a great deal about the very specific areas of Austin that impact the daily lives of a large number of individuals with disabilities. The City would benefit from knowing the exact intersections, crosswalks, or sidewalks that a large number of individuals with disabilities use each day. Outreach could be done at the Texas School for the Blind and/or Texas School for the Deaf.

- 4) Finally, we believe the City of Austin could do more to remind large employers of their obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act. In particular, the City has a unique opportunity to discuss these matters as part of incentives to bring employers to Austin. During these negotiations, the City could make the employer aware of the City of Austin's commitment to diversity, which includes hiring people with disabilities.