

**Metropolitan  
Area  
Religious  
Coalition of  
Cincinnati**

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Archdiocese of Cincinnati

Association of Unity Churches

Baptist Ministers Conference  
of Cincinnati and Vicinity

Cincinnati Conference  
(Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)

Cincinnati Islamic Center

Disciples of Christ – SW Ohio

Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio

Greek Orthodox Church of  
Holy Trinity-St. Nicholas

Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance

JCRC of The Jewish Federation

Miami Association (American Baptists)

Ohio River Valley District  
(United Methodist Church)

Presbytery of Cincinnati

Religious Society of Friends

Southwest Ohio-Northeast Kentucky Division  
(The Salvation Army)

Unitarian Universalist Council  
of Greater Cincinnati

United Church of Christ

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February 10, 2009

To: Members, City of Cincinnati Planning Commission

Re: Proposed Zoning Text Amendments Related to  
Regulation of Social Service Uses

Thank you for holding this public meeting to hear comment on the proposed Zoning Text Amendments regarding social services. We commend the City Planning Staff and the volunteer Social Service Committee (SSC) for the diligent research and hard work concerning definitions of social services and for wrestling with the concept of “concentrated social services” as required by Council. The Metropolitan Area Religious Coalition of Cincinnati (MARCC), the way 17 religious judicatories work together on matters of social justice, was represented on the Social Service Committee (SSC) as convened by the Planning Department to work on the proposed Zoning Text Amendments.

The MARCC Executive Board offers the following comments and recommendations on those Amendments.

**-We urge the Commission not to adopt the 32 Zoning Text Amendments as presented**

The proposed 32 Zoning Text Amendments under consideration reveal the great difficulty, perhaps impossibility of articulating a definition of “concentration of social services,” especially when “concentration” is viewed solely as bringing negative impacts to neighborhoods rather than needed services for our least fortunate. While those negatives are attributed to the presence of social agencies, the underlying message in the proposed changes shifts those negatives to poor people struggling with severe economic problems and disabling conditions. 25% of our residents have income below Federal Poverty standards.

**-We recommend reconsideration of the Commission’s task regarding “concentration of social services” and urge you to use your planning expertise and best practices of municipal zoning, *not* the regulation of social service agencies and programs, nor those they serve.**

The interfaith religious community that came together to form MARCC forty years ago did so to work together on social justice issues including civil rights and social justice for minorities, the poor, the unhoused, and those in need. The zoning Text Amendments as presented pose substantial obstacles to MARCC member judicatories to meet social justice mandates universally found in our several faith traditions – to care for the poor, to feed the hungry, to house the homeless, to provide treatment for those who struggle with disabling conditions, and to work toward social justice for all. Notable among the obstacles in the

Text Amendments as proposed are the distance requirements (1000' and 500') from other services, residential districts, and schools imposed on Human Services Facilities, Human Service Multi-use Facilities, Shelters, and Supportive Housing. The proposed 55' separation from certain residential districts and schools is particularly troublesome as it leaves few areas of the City for services that promote living in the community as afforded to those who are not poor. No other use in the Code has foot/distance requirements except Sexually Oriented Business.

**-As a matter of urgency, provide the community – religious and secular – with clarity in interpretation of the definition of Religious Assembly and RLUIPA within the City's codes so that religious groups may work with the City *and* their local communities to fulfill their obligations to care for the poor and the disabled in humane, legal, and cost-effective ways to benefit the entire community.**

While the Judicatory members of MARCC recognize that as good citizens and residents of the City, our congregations, buildings, and programs must follow zoning codes and all regulations of our City, we find the proposed definitions and interpretation related to Religious Assembly confusing and contradictory – social services have been removed from the definition of religious assembly, but are assumed in the justification as covered under the federal Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA). No doubt they are equally confusing to those whose interests are preserving neighborhoods and sustaining property values.

Thank you for consideration of these comments and recommendations. We trust the Commission will not adopt the Zoning Text Amendments as proposed.

Approved by the MARCC Executive Board  
February 6, 2009