

## To the Evanston Press from Joining Forces for Affordable Housing

Dear Editor:

In Evanston, it is illegal for more than 3 unrelated adults to live in one apartment or house. This restriction, documented in the City's zoning code, is often referred to as "the 3-Unrelated Rule," or more interestingly, "the Brothel Law."

Although the rule is examined every few years, it has remained in place. Joining Forces for Affordable Housing, an advocacy coalition led by Connections for the Homeless, is grateful to Alderman Don Wilson for referring the rule to the Plan Commission for new consideration and possible repeal. His referral led to the recent [Zoning Committee discussion](#) on February 24, which highlighted why repeal of the law has been difficult to achieve so far.

The most persistent argument in support of the rule is that it is perceived as a way to minimize the conversion of single-family homes for use by Northwestern students--with accompanying changes in neighborhood character and an increased frequency of nuisance behavior by students.

Joining Forces opposes the rule because 1) it limits the ability of people who can't afford their own housing to reduce their costs by sharing housing with others, and 2) it has failed to prevent conversion of single-family homes into student housing or relieve the stress on neighbors of student "party houses."

**Joining Forces advocates that this law be repealed and that the City change its zoning code to:**

- Remove occupancy limits that are based on relationships among tenants; and
- Establish limits based on objective measures, such as number of people per bedroom or per square foot that will allow full use of the property while preserving resident safety.

Sharing housing has always been a survival strategy for people who cannot afford housing on their own.

**The 3-Unrelated rule prohibits this strategy, even criminalizes it. By repealing the rule, the City can take immediate action to increase affordable housing opportunities, with no cost in subsidies or programming.**

Joining Forces has other objections to the 3-Unrelated Rule including::

1. The rule is discriminatory and perpetuates inequity and exclusion.
2. Zoning is not an appropriate tool with which to manage resident behavior.
3. The law sets arbitrary limits that fail to prevent overcrowding.
4. Enforcement of the law is highly unlikely and a poor use of City resources.



5. The rule is an ineffective tool for managing neighborhood change.

Read more about Joining Forces' objections to the 3-Unrelated Rule [on our blog](#).

We ask residents to express their support for changing this restrictive and unfair ordinance by communicating about it with their aldermen, and we ask the City Council to repeal the 3-Unrelated Rule.

Thank you.

Sue Loellbach  
Manager of Advocacy, Joining Forces for Affordable Housing  
Connections for the Homeless



## **To the Evanston Press from Connections for the Homeless**

To be submitted on March 31, 2021

Dear Editor:

Connections for the Homeless runs a residential program for homeless young adults between the ages of 18 and 24. This program, called Our House, started in a two-flat purchased specifically for this purpose by community members. Connections leases the building at an affordable rate and staffs it 24 hours a day. As part of one of its two units, the building has a large finished basement with its own bathroom and multiple rooms that could potentially be used as bedrooms. However, the building is considered a 2-unit building and, thus, under the 3-Unrelated Rule, Connections is allowed to house only 6 young adults in it, even though the building could easily house 9.

In total, Connections' youth program currently houses 35 young people, including the 6 living in the Our House two-flat. The rest live in rented, scattered-site units. Many of our residents have graduated from Our House to these more independent living situations, and the majority share their units with other youth who can't afford apartments of their own. Evidence is showing that living in shared housing not only increases affordability for residents but that, for young residents, it increases stability and housing success.

It is difficult to count the actual number of homeless youth in North Suburban Cook County—young people who are often couch-surfing and not in touch with service providers. The most recent count by the Alliance to End Homelessness in Suburban Cook County found approximately 80 homeless youth in our region. However, we estimate that the number is much higher. Connections has an active waiting list of 20 homeless youth, and we receive additional inquiries for housing each month. Being able to provide beds for three additional youth at Our House would be a significant addition to our program and benefit the community by helping three more of its young people to reach their potential.

Homeless youth are just one group of people who need the City of Evanston to repeal the 3-Unrelated Rule. Connections for the Homeless sees many senior citizens struggling to pay for their apartments on fixed incomes. We see people who were born and raised in Evanston and are now working at wages that are insufficient for them to live in Evanston now as adults. We see people trying to survive on minimum wage jobs or disability income who might be able to make ends meet in Evanston if they could share a large house with other renters. And, yes, we see many students who need the affordability of shared housing as well.

Connections stands behind the recommendation of our program, Joining Forces for Affordable Housing, to repeal the 3-Unrelated Rule. We urge the City to take swift action to support its residents in need of affordable housing—including youth. We hope that, by summer, 3 more young people experiencing homelessness can move into our 2-flat and continue their journey to self-sufficiency.



Thank you.

Betty Bogg, Executive Director  
Connections for the Homeless

Seprina Redmond, Youth Programs Manager  
Connections for the Homeless