



## City Targets Halfway Houses' Zoning

*February 10, 2014 WICS NewsChannel 20*

Halfway houses in Springfield are the target of the Springfield Zoning Department. The only two organizations contracted with the Department of Corrections to house ex-offenders have been told they are not "good to go."

The State of Illinois has about 28,000 ex-offenders out on parole right now. To be out on parole, you need a permanent place to stay. For the 350 or so who can't find a friend or family member to stay with, a halfway house may be the only option. But it's only an option if its open.

For the past three and nine years, respectively, Adulthood Transition Center has operated two halfway houses in Springfield. But on Jan. 29, the Springfield Zoning Department sent the organization a letter informing its owner it might be in violation of city zoning. If that's the case, and he can't get his zoning changed, that could lead to the houses being shut down.

That's not good news for parolees.

"People like me would have been stuck in prison doing extra time that they shouldn't have to do," said parolee Michael Williams, who is staying at Adulthood Transition's Jackson Street home. "I done did my time. You know? I'm ready to come out and be in society again. I can't do that if a place like this wasn't there."

The letter comes at the same time that House of Rainbow, which operates four such houses, has been told to stop its operations. Rainbow already failed in its attempt to change its zoning, which started this summer.

"The city's known exactly what was happening there and knew the zoning from 2005 forward. They've always known," said Rainbow's attorney, Thomas Immel.

The head of Adulthood Transition, Calvin Jones, did not want to speak on camera, but having seen House of Rainbow go through the same process he said he's nervous. He wouldn't be the only one affected, though. If the halfway houses are shut down, it could affect parolee reentry.

"Quite simply, it's math," said Tom Shaer, the Department of Corrections' spokesman. "You have fewer spots for them."

And fewer spots makes it harder or impossible to find one for everyone.

"They could be, conceivably, returned to prison," Shaer said. "It would also have a ramification where we wouldn't be able to let parolees out when we planned to or when they've earned that release."

It's not a done deal yet. Immel said he and his client will continue to fight, and where Rainbow had two community groups fighting against it during its zoning battle, Newschannel 20 did not find any resistance to the Adulthood Transition buildings.

"I've been living here since 2001, but I stay to myself," said Susan Weller, who lives up the block from Adulthood Transition's 11th Street location. "So, I mean, they don't bother me; so I don't bother them. That's the way it goes."

The city's communications director said no one at the city knew either House of Rainbow or Adulthood Transition Center were operating halfway houses and it only began its investigations when tipped.

A report from the fire safety division tipped off zoning to House of Rainbow about the time one of Rainbow's parolees was arrested for murder. The communications director said an anonymous complaint tipped the Zoning Department off to Adulthood Transition Center. Again, that came in around the time Rainbow's case was wrapping up.

Shaer said it is up to each organization to notify the host city where it operates that it is running a halfway house.