



U.S. Department of Justice
Civil Rights Division

Assistant Attorney General
950 Pennsylvania Ave, NW - RFK
Washington, DC 20530

September 4, 2025

Via Electronic Mail

Mayor Rodger Lingerfelt
City of Rainsville, Alabama
70 McCurdy Avenue S.
Rainsville, AL 35986

c/o Bradley W. Cornett
Attorney for the City of Rainsville
FORD, HOWARD & CORNETT, P.C.
Gadsden, AL 35902
Brad@FordHowardCornett.com

Re: Investigation of the City of Rainsville, Alabama under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000, and the Fair Housing Act, DJ # 204-1-98

Dear Mr. Cornett:

This letter is to notify you that the Department of Justice has opened an investigation into the City of Rainsville, Alabama (City), to determine compliance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (RLUIPA), and the Fair Housing Act (FHA). This investigation began after the Department received a complaint by Total Recovery Ministries (TRM), a Christian recovery organization in northern Alabama, alleging that the City violated the law when it denied a variance for TRM to operate a faith-based residential recovery and discipleship program for men seeking to overcome drug and alcohol addiction.

Title II of the ADA provides that “no qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity, or be subjected to discrimination by any such entity.” 42 U.S.C. § 12132. The FHA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 3601–3619, also prohibits discrimination by municipalities whose discriminatory practices make housing unavailable to persons because of disability. And, RLUIPA prohibits application of a land use regulation that: (1) imposes a substantial burden on religious exercise absent a compelling governmental interest pursued in the least restrictive means; (2) treats a religious assembly or institution on less than equal terms with a nonreligious assembly or institution; (3) discriminates against a religious assembly or institution on the basis of religion or religious denomination; and/or (4) totally excludes or unreasonably limits religious assemblies, institutions, or structures within a jurisdiction. 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000cc-2000cc-5.

Our investigation will focus on the City's denial of TRM's request for a variance and whether that denial violated the ADA, FHA or RLUIPA. Our investigation is preliminary in nature, and we have not made any determination as to whether Rainsville violated these statutes.

We believe the public interest and the interests of Rainsville will be best served by our having complete and accurate information about your zoning and land use practices. To that end, we request that you provide, within one week of this letter, the name, physical address, email address, and telephone number of the person to whom this office should direct future questions and correspondence. Please provide this information to David Gardner, david.gardner@usdoj.gov, and Noah Sacks, noah.sacks@usdoj.gov, Trial Attorneys in the Civil Rights Division. They may also be reached by phone at (202) 598-1628. We will consider all relevant information, and we welcome your assistance in sharing and identifying relevant information.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Harmeet K. Dhillon', is written over the typed name and title.

Harmeet K. Dhillon
Assistant Attorney General
Civil Rights Division