

## Rethinking in Manassas

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**MANASSAS** OFFICIALS have acted prudently by suspending enforcement of an outlandish city zoning law that would prohibit aunts, uncles, cousins -- even great-grandparents -- from living together as a family. In its one-month lifespan, the law, evidently drafted in haste and with inadequate lawyering, has had the effect of discriminating almost exclusively against Latino immigrants, some legal, some not. It has brought **Manassas** no end of grief and promised more in the form of lawsuits that the city would probably lose. The best option is for the City Council to repeal the ordinance.

One may sympathize with the city's plight, widely shared in suburban Washington, of having to contend with overcrowding, of which immigration may be a contributing cause. Some **Manassas** officials said overcrowding was the ill they tried to address with the law; others, arguably less politic, said the real problem was illegal immigration. In any case, the solution they settled on was worse than the problem -- an ordinance that, by encroaching on families and their right to privacy, flies in the face of American tradition and probably the Constitution as well.

The practical effect of the law was visits and interrogations carried out by city inspectors at homes that were not necessarily overcrowded but were by and large Hispanic. In at least one case, a family of Hispanic immigrants who are American citizens felt it had to leave the area because of the law. That evidently heartened white nationalists and nativists, who cheered the law (and sneered at immigrants) in ugly Internet postings. Civil libertarians, including the American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia, were rightly outraged, and planned to sue.

As the ACLU has noted, the city is within its rights to limit the number of occupants living under one roof where genuine overcrowding raises health or safety risks. **Manassas** officials should be able to fashion a new ordinance that addresses those legitimate concerns without excluding nieces and nephews from the city's definition of an acceptable family unit for the purposes of cohabitation.

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