

## City takes on the fed

### Officials say law on churches 'hijacks' zoning board

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**WOONSOCKET** — Has the federal government hijacked the zoning board?

When it comes to churches — yes, say members of the City Council.

The board passed a resolution recently asking Congress for relief from a two-year-old law it says has robbed the

Zoning Board of Review of its authority to control how and where religious groups use land and buildings for churches and other religious ventures.

Signed into law in September 2000, the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA) was at the heart of two recent lawsuits that had been filed against the city by churches seeking to reoccupy vacant

commercial property. Citing RLUIPA, the city's Law Department opted to settle the suits, allowing the Harvest Community Church and the First Pentecostal Church of Christ to establish churches against the wishes of the Zoning Board of Review.

On Oct. 21, the council unanimously passed a resolution petitioning Congress to "modify or repeal" RLUIPA, saying

"the goals and purposes of the ordinance had been frustrated by the law."

"The effect of the act is to exempt religious institutions from generally applicable zoning regulations, including ... parking setback requirements, u

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