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Regulators: Few options to address unlicensed group homes

Posted by Jason Johnson | May 16, 2018 | Bay Briefs | 0 | ★★★★★

Local health inspectors have more authority over where people cook crawfish than over who can operate makeshift nursing homes with no medical training.

That’s the picture Brad Philips, district manager of inspection services at the Mobile County Health Department (MCHD), painted when asked about unregulated boarding homes in the area.

“It’s very frustrating to know that, unless you can get the city or county to cite [an unlicensed facility] for a building or zoning violation, really all you can do is document what’s going on and try to see if somebody has some teeth they can sink into it,” Philips said.

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Such facilities are not licensed through any state agency and are not inspected to ensure quality of care, adequate staff training or basic living standards. They hide in plain sight.

The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) acknowledges there are many of these homes locally, though exactly where is a guessing game. Typically located in residential neighborhoods, some of these homes house patients with mental illnesses, the elderly or both.

Even when such a facility is suspected, the task of addressing it often falls between the cracks of regulatory authorities. When MCHD inspectors receive reports about an unlicensed facility, Philips said there are very few options to do anything about it.

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