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Municipalities wrangle with religion over zoning laws.

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Pomona, a rural village in Rockland County, New York, has become a key player in a growing legal tug-of-war between local lawmakers and the federal government. At the heart of the dispute is the question of whether a federal statute, the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA), can preempt local zoning ordinances to protect religious freedom.


Passed by Congress in 2000, RLUIPA says municipalities may not impose "a land-use regulation in a manner that imposes a substantial burden on the religious exercise of a person" unless it can show a "compelling" public interest in doing so. The law has irked leaders of some municipalities, who call it vague, arbitrary, and an intrusion of federal policy into local land-use laws. Supporters of RLUIPA say the law is necessary to prevent unfair land-use decisions based on religious prejudice....

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