

# Court decides shelter dispute

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## Wives city both claim victory

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The bitter dispute over a Hackensack shelter for battered wives ended in Bergen County District Court yesterday — and both sides said they won.

Judge David B. Follender pleased the city of Hackensack by ordering Sandy Ramos not to use her two-family home at 133 Cedar Ave. as a refuge for battered wives and their children. He also found her guilty of overcrowding the home by allowing as many as 14 persons to occupy it.

But the judge suspended the \$25 fine for overcrowding and ruled against the city on two other counts. He found Ms. Ramos innocent of operating a business in a residential zone, and he declared part of the city's zoning law unconstitutional.

Citing a New Jersey Supreme Court decision involving Teaneck's zoning law, Judge Follender struck down a section of the Hackensack zoning code which prohibits more than three unrelated persons from living together. Ms. Ramos had been charged with violating that section because she lives with two unrelated women and four children.

"I'm really pleased with the decision," said Ms. Ramos, executive director of Shelter Our Sisters (SOS). "The judge declared a city ordinance unconstitutional. I think that was dynamite. It was a progressive change."

"As far as I'm concerned, the city won," said Seymour Chase, the attorney representing Hackensack. He said the city had accomplished what it set out to do: prevent a wives shelter from operating in a residential zone, and enforce zoning restrictions on overcrowding.

"We never said it wasn't overcrowded," said Ms. Ramos. "We just said that we had to do it because there was no other place for these women to go." She said she had accomplished what she set out to do: get government help for battered wives.

Since Ms. Ramos's fight with Hackensack began three months ago, the Bergen County Board of Freeholders and the Community Action Program have made plans for public shelters for battered wives and their children. A telephone hot line also has been set up for women who have been beaten by their husbands.

Judge Follender yesterday praised Ms. Ramos and SOS for their efforts. Ms. Ramos took women into her home for three years until a Superior Court judge issued a temporary injunction in April.

"If it were in an area zoned for that purpose, it would gain the wholehearted support of the community," said Follender. But he added that it was beyond the court's power to approve a shelter which is in an area zoned for residential use.