

Nursing home residents want to get out and live on their own

■ **The case:** Does it violate federal law to force people to live in a public nursing home when the same money could help pay for their care at home or in the community?

Residents of a San Francisco nursing home who want to rejoin the world are getting help from AARP attorneys and other advocacy groups who have gone to court on their behalf. The class action suit, filed last October in the federal district court for the Northern District of California, seeks to force the city to provide long-term care services for residents who wish to leave the Laguna Honda nursing home.

In 2004, after an earlier court battle, the city agreed to evaluate the ability of the residents of the 1,200-bed public facility to live at home or in community housing if they had help. The assessments found that 80 percent of the residents wanted to—and could—live on their own with support.

The suit charges that the city is violating federal



Laguna Honda doesn't feel like home to some.

disability laws. Restricting a person who prefers to live in the community, if care and services there would cost the same or less, to a nursing home is isolating and discriminatory. The city has made little headway, the suit contends, in shifting its resources and residents away from Laguna Honda. In fact, the city is rebuilding the sprawling old institution, one of the largest nursing homes in the country, even though a number of long-term care consultants have advised against constructing that kind of big facility.

Aleeta Van Runkle of the city attorney's office says Laguna Honda residents have "complex needs, and it takes time and many more resources to ensure they get the housing and services they need."

But resident Phillip Kiles, a former housepainter, says, "I'm 62, and I've been in Laguna Honda since 2005. I'm sick of being here."

■ **What it means to you:** "This case," says Bruce Vignery, an AARP attorney, "is part of a larger AARP push to shift more state and federal money for long-term care away from nursing homes to home and community services like visiting nurses and home care aides."

"Americans have made it clear they prefer to age at home with the help of services," he says. "But a disproportionate amount of public money still goes to nursing homes, and that needs to change." □