

Village of Belle Terre v. Boraas
416 U.S. 1 (1974)

Belle Terre is a small town on the north shore of Long Island. A town ordinance restricted land use to one-family dwellings, expressly excluding lodging, boarding, fraternity, or multiple-dwelling houses. A "family" was defined by the ordinance as: "[o]ne or more persons related by blood, adoption, or marriage, living and cooking together as a single housekeeping unit, exclusive of household servants. A number of persons but not exceeding two (2) living and cooking together as a single housekeeping unit, though not related by blood, adoption, or marriage shall be deemed to constitute a family."

The appellees leased a housing in the village to six unrelated college students. By a vote of 7 to 2, the Court upheld the statute, ruling that it was not arbitrary, did not unreasonably apply to some individuals and not others, and was reasonably related to a rational state objective. The majority opinion, written by Justice Douglas contained a memorable paean to suburban life:

A quiet place where yards are wide, people few, and motor vehicles restricted are legitimate guidelines in a land use project addressed to family needs. This goal is a permissible one The police power is not confined to elimination of filth, stench, and unhealthy places. It is ample to lay out zones where family values, youth values, and the blessings of quiet seclusion and clean air make the area a sanctuary for people.