

To combat racist settlements like the “Return to the Land” project in Arkansas, lawmakers could strengthen and enforce civil rights protections that already exist — and close the loopholes that groups like this exploit. Though the Fair Housing Act prohibits racial discrimination in housing, RTTL attempts to bypass these laws by labeling itself a “private membership association.” A new law could explicitly prohibit any residential community, PMA, or land trust from using ancestry, race, or religion as membership criteria. State and local governments could also revise zoning and permit laws to deny public infrastructure or recognition to any group engaged in racial exclusion. Additionally, such communities could be investigated as hate groups if their materials, recruitment practices, or ideology promote white supremacy. In short, both legal enforcement and legislative action are needed to ensure that segregationist compounds disguised as “freedom communities” are treated for what they are: violations of civil rights and threats to democratic society.

Fair Housing Act – 42 U.S.C. § 3604:

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/42/3604>

Religious Exemption – 42 U.S.C. § 3607(a):

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/42/3607>

Civil Rights Act of 1964 – Public Accommodations (42 U.S.C. § 2000a):

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/42/2000a>

Equal Protection Clause – 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution:

<https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-14/>

