

Chicken owner files complaint BY SUE KIESEWETTER | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

FAIRFIELD - A Fairfield woman has taken a fight to keep her chickens to the Ohio Civil Rights Commission.

Joyce Branham filed a charge against the city of Fairfield on Thursday in an effort to keep her five beloved chickens. She alleges the city is discriminating against her on the basis of a handicap.

Later Thursday, Branham was hospitalized at Good Samaritan Hospital and is undergoing tests to determine whether she had a stroke. Friends are feeding the chickens, said Jonne Messer, a friend who took her to the hospital.

Last month, council adopted an ordinance banning farm animals in the city unless they are kept on property of at least two acres zoned for agriculture or estates. The change was prompted by complaints about Branham's chickens. The ordinance took effect Wednesday.

"The ordinance was passed because my neighbors felt that my support animals depreciate their property values as well as create a possible health hazard," Branham wrote in her charge.

"My physician has stated that my animals are necessary for my emotional well-being and health."

On May 8, Branham's physician, Dr. Richard Meyer, provided a statement that says the chickens are part of



Enquirer File

Joyce Branham with one of the five pet chickens she has at her home on East Scioto Drive in Fairfield.

Branham's therapy for chronic anxiety. She has said the animals helped her through two bouts of cancer and diabetes.

Under the Americans With Disabilities Act and the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Branham should be allowed to keep her chickens, said R.E. Jackson, a retired police officer who sits on the Ohio Governor's Council On People With Disabilities.

"She did not know the correct language - reasonable accommodation - when approaching council," said Jackson, of Sharonville. "These animals are providing a therapeutic (treatment) and are protected by law."

The Ohio Civil Rights Commission has begun an investigation, said spokeswoman Toni Delgado. It should be done within a month.

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