Michael Duvalle squared up in front of a two-story brick building on a quiet residential block in southern Queens and brought a megaphone to his lips. A retired security executive and local resident, Mr. Duvalle had a message for the commissioner of the city’s Administration for Children’s Services, Gladys Carrión.

“Commissioner, if you’re listening,” he began, his amplified voice ricocheting off the facade, “this is Mike Duvalle asking you to put this prison in your neighborhood, not in our neighborhood!”

Ms. Carrión was not in the building. Nobody was. But Mr. Duvalle’s bit of political theater on Saturday capped an hourlong rally by more than 40 residents of South Ozone Park, the latest action in a growing protest against the city’s conversion of the building, once a convent, into a center for adolescents who have committed acts of delinquency.

The center is part of the Close to Home program, an initiative started in 2012 by Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, a Democrat, to place some juvenile delinquents — those who are not sentenced to secure facilities...
upstate — in group homes closer to their families. In New York City, the program’s centers are overseen by the Administration for Children’s Services.

The South Ozone Park center has set off vociferous opposition among some residents of the neighborhood who, since mid-February, have held weekly protest marches through the district to rally more critics. Last week, residents escalated their fight, filing a class-action lawsuit seeking to stop the opening of the center.

Residents have also marshaled the support of politicians who represent the neighborhood, including City Councilman Ruben W. Wills, who has been working with residents for months to block the project. And on Friday, the Queens borough president, Melinda Katz, another Democrat, stepped up her own opposition, sending a letter to Mayor Bill de Blasio requesting that the South Ozone Park location “be shelved” and that the city find an alternate site.

South Ozone Park — bounded roughly by the Van Wyck Expressway to the east, the Belt Parkway to the south, Aqueduct Racetrack to the west and 107th Avenue to the north — is a quiet, largely middle-class residential neighborhood of small one- and two-family homes with a large minority population, many of whom are immigrants.

The two-story former convent sits on 127th Street amid residential homes. For weeks, workers have been renovating the building, preparing it for its rechristening as a Close to Home center meant to house up to 18 teenagers. A so-called limited-secure residence, it will have doors and windows that are locked and a high perimeter wall, and its residents will receive on-site schooling and other services, officials said.

Close to Home also supports a network of so-called nonsecure residences, for juvenile delinquents deemed to present no security risk to the public.

About 30 nonsecure residences have opened across the city, and six limited-secure residences, including the one in South Ozone Park, are scheduled to open soon in Queens, Brooklyn and the Bronx.
There has apparently been little or no resistance to the other five proposed limited-secure locations in New York City.

Critics say the South Ozone Park center raises concerns for the safety of neighborhood residents in the event that one of its charges escape. Furthermore, they contend, the center’s presence could lower property values.

They also argue that the neighborhood has already done its part to support the Close to Home program: In the first phase of the initiative, begun in 2012, the city opened a six-bed, nonsecure group home on 128th Street, a block away from the new center. (That center opened so quietly and has kept such a low profile that many neighbors, including some of the most active critics of the new center, did not know about it until recent months.)

The neighborhood also has a men’s homeless shelter that includes convicted sex offenders, residents and officials said.

“This is not a Nimby issue and a lot of folks will try to make it that,” said Councilman Wills, using the acronym for “not in my backyard.” “It’s an enough-is-enough issue.”

“We’re saddened by 30 years of dumping on our community,” he added.

The lawsuit against the project was filed on Tuesday by three neighborhood residents and the South Ozone Park Civic Association West. The complaint, which names the owner and the operator of the center as defendants, contends that residents “will likely suffer irreparable harm, especially as to their safety and economic interests,” if the project is allowed to proceed.

“I want to make this clear: We’re not against the Close to Home initiative,” said Jeysha Ruiz, a leader of the opposition movement. “What we’re against is the inappropriate placement of the facility. It doesn’t belong in our neighborhood.”

In an interview last week, Ms. Carrión, the children’s services commissioner, said the city selected the
site under the administration of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg. But she defended the choice, saying a city analysis this year found that the location complied with city regulations, known as fair share criteria, that seek to ensure the fair distribution of the burdens and benefits associated with city facilities.

“This community is not being overburdened and treated any differently than any other community,” Ms. Carrión said. “I don’t think that 24 young people in a community really presents a burden.”

Ms. Carrión also defended the placement of Close to Home centers in residential neighborhoods, saying the approach helped to improve the reintegration of troubled youths into the general population and eventually reunite them with their families.

“We don’t want to isolate them. They don’t have the plague,” said Ms. Carrión, who was an architect of the Close to Home program when she led the state’s Office of Children and Family Services. Residents have heard these arguments and remain unconvinced. “For all intents and purposes, it’s a prison,” said Betty Braton, chairwoman of Queens Community Board 10. “Yes, we need those types of facilities, but it doesn’t have to go on a residential block.”

**Correction: April 27, 2015**

An earlier version of this article misstated the name of the street that is the northern boundary of South Ozone Park. It is 107th Avenue, not Street.

A version of this article appears in print on April 27, 2015, on page A16 of the New York edition with the headline: Opposition Grows as Home for Troubled Youths Comes to Quiet Queens Block.