

Chairman Casey and members of the House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing:

My name is Dianne Kayala and I am writing to you today in support of bill number 7063, sponsored by Representative Spears.

I have spent my career working with individuals of all ages with disabilities whether they be sudden and traumatic in nature, medically worsened over time or lifelong. Having conducted hundreds of accessibility assessments of homes, I can vouch that retrofitting: widening entrances, ramping thresholds, converting bathtubs to accessible showers and kitchen modifications are far more costly than applying universal design principles at the time of new construction. Public funding for modifications is limited, so for lower income Rhode Islanders, individuals must often prioritize which needed modification can be afforded. Should one be able to get in and out of a house, or use the bathroom/bathing? The parts of a home left inaccessible generally also result in increased need for an aide to help with or directly perform home activities.

The number of people who survive accidents with severe disabilities rises with continued medical advances, and those 65 + are expected to comprise 20% of the population by 2030. Furthermore these people are also likely to have moderate or low income, so to be reliant on public assistance for more expensive retrofitted accessibility features.

I strongly urge passage of House Bill 7063 as an investment in the future community integration of Rhode Islanders of all ages.

Dianne Kayala