

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

My name is Holly Snyder. I write to you in support of House Bill number 7063, sponsored by Representative Spears.

It is difficult to imagine what a struggle ordinary life can be until you have had to help a loved one with a disability navigate an environment that is completely inhospitable to wheelchairs. This happened to me when my husband had a massive stroke at the age of 28 due to a malignant brain tumor, and I saw up close how much the built environment limited where he could go and how he could get there, even in his own home. At a time in his life when we wanted to take his mind off his illness and medical treatment as much as possible, my in-laws and I were stymied by a built environment that was incapable of accommodating his needs. Year later, when my uncle sustained a spinal cord injury that left him a quadriplegic, my aunt had to completely renovate their home (at considerable expense) in order to make it into a space where he could return to live.

Many disabled people and their families are already burdened by chronic illness and the high costs of medical care. They simply lack the resources to undertake expensive home renovations to make an old home more accessible, but the proportion of housing in Rhode Island that is currently ADA-compliant is insufficient to meet the demand for accessible living space. The principles of universal design present an important means of creating new housing that will be accessible to everyone, making a more level playing field for persons with physical disabilities and neutralizing many of the stigmas they face daily. When applied in construction, universal design principles would ensure that housing, transportation options and other community features are safe and accessible to as many people as possible by including features such as:

- \*ramps, elevators, and accessible kitchens and bathrooms to ensure access for people in wheelchairs.
- \*a no-step entry and wide doorways to allow for wheelchair access
- \*easy-grasp lever-style handles in place of door knobs

It has been projected that by 2030, the proportion of the U. S. population aged over 65 will account for nearly 20 percent of the entire population. Our housing stock needs to change in order to accommodate this population shift, and enhance accessibility in particular for older adults and people with disabilities. This bill would allow older Rhode Islanders to stay in their homes longer, and also go a long way toward the goal of alleviating Rhode Island's shortage of affordable housing for persons with disabilities, enabling them to reach farther in achieving their full potential. I urge you to give it your full support.

Sincerely yours,

Holly Snyder  
North Providence