



Testimony of Matthew Netto, AARP Rhode Island

In support of House Bill 7377

House Committee on Municipal Government & Housing Committee

March 6, 2024

Chairman Casey and Members of the Municipal Government & Housing Committee:

AARP is a nonpartisan, social mission organization with 38 million members nationwide and nearly 128,000 members here in Rhode Island. We advocate on behalf of issues that impact older adults, and we appreciate the opportunity to offer our support for creating a housing stock that can accommodate persons of all abilities, as House Bill 7377 from Representative Stewart is intended to do.

According to the Rhode Island Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, in 2021, 26% of all Rhode Islanders and 39% of those 65 years old or older were living with a disability. We must work towards creating livable communities for Rhode Islanders of all ages and abilities. Accessible housing is an important part of a livable community and that is why AARP supports House Bill 7377.

This bill would provide that certain new housing construction contain at least one floor that meets the requirements for a Type C (Visitable) Unit of the American National Standards Institute (commonly known as "ANSI") Standards for Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities (section 1005 of ICC ANSI A117.1-5 2009).

"Visitability" typically has three requirements: a zero-step entrance, 32-inch doorway clearances, and an accessible bathroom on the main floor. As the term suggests, visitability assists a certain group of people who need such features in a dwelling for short term living/visits/limited livability scope. Whereas Universal Design (UD) provides an even wider array of features that improve usability, safety, and health for a more diverse group. UD covers the design needs of as many people as possible – those of different ages and abilities. Typically, UD makes a dwelling more livable for all ages. While visitability features are really important, UD will help a wider array of the people.

House Bill 7377 is a great bill that will help to provide livable communities for all Rhode Islanders. However, we believe that it could be strengthened by incorporating Universal Design. Earlier this session AARP testified in support of Representative Spears' House Bill 7063, which involves Universal Design. We ask that you look to combine these two important pieces of legislation into one bill that will make Rhode Island more accessible for all. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt R. Netto". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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