



March 7, 2024

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey, Chairman
Members, House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing

Re: Support for H7377

On behalf of the Senior Agenda Coalition of Rhode Island, I write to support **H7377** by Representative Stewart. The mission of the Senior Agenda Coalition is to mobilize people to achieve power in order to implement an agenda that improves the quality of life of older Rhode Islanders. Our Coalition appreciates the tremendous effort that Speaker Shekarchi and other members of the legislature are putting into finding solutions to the housing crisis that impacts all our families including our older householders. The issues are complex and critical and we applaud their commitment to working to address the housing crisis.

Housing is an important issue for our older population.

H7377 establishes a new article in the state Building Code to require certain new housing construction built with federal, state or local government assistance to have at least one level that complies with the “Visitable” Standards (Standards for Type C) of the ANSI Standards for Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities. The bill includes an opportunity to apply for a waiver to the Building Code Standards Committee in case of undue hardship. Our state has an extremely old housing stock. Housing Works RI reports that three-quarters of our housing stock is more than forty years old. Much of this housing lacks accessibility features needed by older persons with ambulatory difficulties and persons with disabilities.

Persons age 65 and over comprise one out of five persons in RI and their numbers are projected to continue to grow during this decade. The 2020 RI Healthy Aging Data Report shows 21 percent of RI older adults with a self-reported ambulatory difficulty which can make persons more prone to falls in housing with outside stairs for access and stairs inside multi-level homes. As the older population continues to grow we can expect the numbers with ambulatory difficulties to increase along with the need for more accessible housing. In addition to increasing accessible housing to meet the needs of older adults with ambulatory challenges, there is also a need for accessible housing for younger persons with mobility challenges which this bill would address.

As family size decreases and the burden of upkeep associated with larger homes becomes challenging, many older households wish to relocate to smaller homes or to move to rental units. However, it can be challenging to find accessible single-family homes or accessible apartments for rent. And there are long wait lists for subsidized housing units with accessible features for low-income older adults and persons with disabilities. As the state plans to invest millions of dollars to develop affordable housing for low and moderate-income persons it is important that the needs of older adults and persons with disabilities are recognized by requiring “Visitable standards” into designs of this new housing.

I urge you to recommend passage of this bill and thank you for your support and attention given to legislation to address the state’s housing crisis.

Sincerely,
Maureen Maigret, Policy Advisor
Senior Agenda Coalition of RI