



Testimony re: **25 House 5268 -- RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES –HOME-FIT DWELLINGS**

Position: **For**

My name is Annette Bourbonniere, and I live in Newport. I am a disabled citizen of Rhode Island.

The number of housing units, either in private dwellings or public housing, that are accessible is extremely limited. There is also a growing number of individuals with disabilities in Rhode Island and the rest of the nation. This growth in disability is even more evident as citizens age.

Making a housing unit, even a home-fit dwelling, accessible in the areas of entry and ease of movement and safety in a bathroom adds little to the cost during original construction, but it becomes expensive to modify the unit to be accessible after. Basic accessibility should be mandatory in all new construction, but enforcement when public funds are used is common sense.

It's easy to think that accessibility is only for the few, but as individuals age, they become more likely to incur a disability. Additionally, aging makes us less steady and more likely to employ mobility aids, such as walkers, wheelchairs, and bars on walls. If an individual is downsizing to an accessory dwelling, the cost of adding accessibility to an already constructed unit could be prohibitive.

Having more housing units that are accessible adds another benefit to individuals with disabilities – we become able to visit more people. Even if we live in houses or apartments that are accessible, disability can prevent us from important social events that are held in the homes of friends and families. Holidays, birthdays, graduations, and other important events are missed. Not being able to be part of family and friends' social activities makes all these events times of loneliness when they should be celebrations.

It's time to start building access into all building plans. Again, when included in original construction or other modifications, we reduce the cost.

Again, please pass this bill this year.

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