



Testimony of Catherine Taylor, AARP Rhode Island
In Support of House Bill 5268
House Municipal Government & Housing Committee
April 10, 2025

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

AARP is a nonpartisan, social mission organization with 38 million members nationwide and 126,000 members here in Rhode Island. We advocate on behalf of issues that impact older adults, and we appreciate the opportunity to support House Bill 5268 sponsored by Representative Spears.

Accessible housing that accommodates people of all ages and ability levels is crucial to the majority of Rhode Islanders; according to AARP's **2023 RI Vital Voices Survey** – 85% of Rhode Islanders 45+ think that it's extremely or very important for them to be able to stay in their own home as they get older. Most existing housing stock and new construction are multi-level with stairs, which poses a challenge for those who develop problems with mobility. House Bill 5268 would create the Home-Fit Dwelling Units Act, to apply to all new construction of covered dwelling units, to incorporate design features that provide safe and convenient use to the greatest extent feasible, regardless of age or physical ability.

House Bill 5268 would apply to all new construction, including those receiving public financial assistance, whether intended for sale or rent. At a minimum, twenty-five percent (25%) of these units shall follow Type A standards.

The Type A unit was created in the International Building Code in the 1970s as the adaptable dwelling unit. It is not required by either the 2010 American Disabilities Act or Fair Housing Accessibility Guidelines, although it is sometimes required where an apartment complex receives federal funding. The Type A unit is between the accessible units and the Type A units for wheelchair access. While some elements, such as the doors, are constructed the same as the accessible units, Type A is designed to allow for some features to be modified/added based on the tenants' needs—such as adding grab bars in the bathrooms or being able to pull cabinets from under sinks to provide for a front approach.¹

House Bill 5268 would require that the first-floor dwelling unit of a multi-story building comply with the dwelling unit design provisions completely while second and higher floors must be Type B adaptable units. Custom built homes shall be exempt from these requirements.

The Type B dwelling unit is intended to match the Fair Housing Accessibility Guidelines. Type B units are more about homes for life or aging in place—they are usable by a person in a wheelchair, but not wheelchair friendly. For example, the doors within the units are wide enough for a person using a walker

¹ <https://www.iccsafe.org/building-safety-journal/bsj-technical/alphabet-soup-for-dwelling-and-sleeping-units-2/#:~:text=The%20Type%20A%20unit%20went,provide%20for%20a%20front%20approach.>

or wheelchair to get through the door, but there are no requirements for maneuvering clearances, lever hardware, etc. Only the front door is required to meet the higher accessibility requirements.²

It is estimated that the population of older adults will increase from 40 million to 89 million between 2010 and 2050. That means older adults will go from making up 13 percent of the population to 20 percent of the estimated population. As a result, demand for more housing that is suitable for older adults is expected to increase. In Rhode Island, it is expected that 1 out of every 4 residents will be 65 or older by 2030, while adults living with disabilities account for 13 percent of the total state population, versus 12 percent nationally.

Rhode Island is experiencing a housing crisis, and it is weighing heavily on older adults who want to age in their own community. Indeed, AARP's 2023 Long Term Services and Supports Scorecard ranked Rhode Island 51st, or dead last, of all the states for the availability of housing for older adults. The lack of accessible housing in our state will become an even larger problem as our population continues to age. The Livable Home Modification grant program is a great example of the need for accessible housing in Rhode Island. Demand for the program continues to outpace its funding, with about 200 grants given each year and many left on a waiting list. House Bill 5268 would create the housing types that our state desperately needs. For this reason, AARP Rhode Island urges you to recommend passage on House Bill 5268. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Catherine Taylor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

Catherine Taylor
State Director, AARP Rhode Island

² <https://www.iccsafe.org/building-safety-journal/bsj-technical/alphabet-soup-for-dwelling-and-sleeping-units-2/#:~:text=The%20Type%20A%20unit%20went,provide%20for%20a%20front%20approach.>