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HOUSE BILL No. 5268

ENTITLED, AN ACT RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES -- HOME-FIT DWELLING UNITS (Creates 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 of to the greatest extent feasible, regardless of age or physical ability.)

Dear Chairman Casey and members of the House Municipal Government and Housing Committee,

I am writing to you today in support of House Bill No. 5268-Home-Fit Dwelling Units-because housing should meet the needs of all individuals, regardless of age or ability level.

Currently, most existing housing and new construction are multi-level and include stairs, which can be challenging for individuals with mobility issues—especially as they grow older. Accessible housing is vital for the majority of Rhode Islanders who wish to remain in their homes as they age.

Universal Design is a principle that promotes accessibility in housing for many people. For instance, a zero-step entrance can be used by anyone, including those in wheelchairs. With a housing shortage crisis that is disproportionately affecting our Rhode Island senior citizens, Universal Design offers one very important solution by creating homes that adapt to people's changing needs, thereby allowing them to remain in their home.

Examples of universal design in housing include features such as wide doorways, adequate maneuvering space in kitchens and bathrooms, easily reachable switches and handles, and slide-out shelves. These relatively simple modifications enable individuals to stay in their homes as their needs change.

Currently pending Senate Bill 714 aims to establish the "Home-Fit Dwelling" Units Act, which would mandate that all new construction of covered dwelling units incorporates design features that ensure safe and convenient use for everyone, regardless of age or physical ability.

"Home-fit" refers to a residential dwelling designed and constructed in compliance with the act's requirements, aimed at providing safe and convenient use to the greatest extent possible for individuals of all ages and abilities.

According to the AARP Long-term Supports and Services scorecard, Rhode Island ranks last in the nation for the availability of housing for older adults. This is unacceptable. The people of Rhode Island, and especially our senior citizens, deserve better.

I ask you today to vote in favor of House Bill No. 5268. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Marianne Kelly