HOUSE COMMITTEE ON MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT & HOUSING
The Honorable Stephen M. Casey, Chair
Testimony by H. Philip West Jr on April 10, 2025,
in support 25-H 5268 by Representative Tina Spears, et. al.,
HOME-FIT DWELLING UNITS

Thank you, Chairman Casey and members of the House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing for this hearing. **I testify in support of Representative Spear's legislation,** 25-H 5268**, that mandates that all new housing construction must contain at least one floor that meets the requirements for a Type A "ANSI" Standards for Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities.**

My name is H. Philip West, Jr., and I serve as a volunteer lobbyist on behalf of The Village Common of Rhode Island, a statewide non-profit that helps older adults stay safely and independently in their homes. We coordinate volunteer services through locally organized villages in Barrington, Burrillville, Cranston, Glocester, Middletown, Newport, Pawtucket, Portsmouth, Providence, Warwick, and Westerly. Our volunteers save lives and money. Our motto is: "Aging Better Together."

In each of the last two years, the Village Common has supported Rep. Spears's legislation that would require universal design principles aimed at ensuring that new homes be fully accessible. We also supported passage of Rep. Stewart's legislation that had similar objectives.

We strongly affirm the work Representatives Stewart and Spears have done on their bills since last year, and we are encouraged that both prime sponsors signed on as co-sponsors of the other's legislation. Both of their 2025 bills address Rhode Island's severe shortage of accessible homes. Both aim to create more livable and usable homes for individuals with varying physical needs.

We recognize significant differences between the scope of 25-H 5268 and 25-H 5374, which incorporate two approaches in models established by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). The International Code Council (ICC) has published a summary of technical differences between Types A and C units.

One primary difference between ANSI Type A and Type C is cost. One study suggests that the initial cost of incorporating barrier-free features during construction is significantly lower than the cost of retrofitting later: roughly 3% for original barrier-free design in single-family homes versus 21% for renovation later. In high-rise residential buildings, these costs were only .25% versus 1.0%, depending on the extent of the features and the type of building.

Cost and likely resistance from developers are factors. In high-rise buildings, the cost of accessible elevators adds only slightly to the overall expense for accessible units but does not fundamentally shift the relative cost difference between Type A and Type C within the individual units.

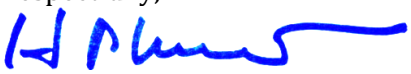
We in the Village Common oppose delaying passage any longer. It is time to pass one of these bills. As new housing units move forward, the needs of our neighbors with mobility issues are being ignored.

We value fully integrating people with mobility issues in residential settings that include adults of all ages and children.

Passage of either 25-H 5268 and 25-H 5374 would be a historic step forward for older adults. As life expectancy rises and Rhode Island's population ages, injuries and health crises disrupt the ability of increasing numbers of older adults to stay safely in their homes. Neither of these bills would force current owners to retrofit their properties, and either approach will steadily increase the availability of accessible homes for older adults.

25-H 5268 grapples with barriers that leave countless Rhode Islanders stranded. With special thanks to Rep. Spears for her leadership over several years in the search for barrier-free homes, The Village Common urges passage of 5268.

Respectfully,



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Accessible Type A and Type C Units in the ANSI A117.1 Standard

	25-H 5268 **Home-Fit Dwelling Units Act** **Rep. Tina Spears**	**25-H 5374** **Inclusive Home Design Act** **Rep. Jennifer Stewart**
Goal	Incorporate universal design principles in all new residential construction, including those that receive public financial assistance.	Ensure that first-floor units of publicly subsidized residential construction are more accessible for a wider range of people.
Scope	Construction of all new dwelling units, regardless of funding source.	All new construction of publicly subsidized dwelling units.
Mandate	All first-floor units in multi-story buildings must comply with Type A standards, while upper floors must adhere to Type B adaptable unit standards. Requires that at least 25% of new housing construction meet Type A ANSI accessibility standards.	All new housing construction receiving federal, state, or local financial assistance must contain at least one floor that meets the requirements for a Type C ANSI Standards for Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities.
Level of Accessibility	**Highest Level of Accessibility**	**Less Stringent Accessibility**
	Type A units are designed to provide a high level of accessibility and accommodate a wider range of needs for individuals with disabilities than Type C, including those who use wheelchairs and other mobility devices.	Type C units require that least one entrance to the unit must be on an accessible route without steps. This entrance does not necessarily have to be the front door.
	Type A requires a full wheelchair ramp with access to all floors, elevators, accessible restrooms on every level, and accessible workstations throughout.	Type C requires a single ramp to the ground floor entrance, a slightly wider doorway, and a basic restroom on that main floor.
ANSI Standards	Type A for a percentage and first floors, Type B (a median ANSI standard) for upper floors.	Type C ANSI standards for at least one floor. Type C standards are less stringent than Type A or Type B.
	Type A standards aim for comprehensive accessibility to support independent living for individuals with disabilities throughout the entire dwelling unit.	Type C standards offer a basic level of accessibility primarily focused on visitability, allowing people with disabilities to enter and use the main areas of a home.

Cost	Type A ANSI standards work well where elevators are essential. The costs associated with accessible kitchens and bathrooms on upper floors remain, and ensuring accessible routes to and within these units is crucial.	Type C ANSI standards are only slightly more expensive than standard construction where elevators are not necessary. One study suggests only 3% higher cost for original barrier-free design in single-family homes versus 21% for renovation later.
ANSI Type	ANSI A117.1 Type A	ANSI A117.1 Type C (Visitable)
Entrance	There must be an unobstructed path of travel connecting the entrance of the dwelling unit to other accessible elements and spaces both inside and outside the unit.	At least one zero-step entrance is required, but it can be any entrance to the unit, not necessarily the primary one.
Interior Routes	All spaces and elements within the unit must be connected by an accessible route.	An accessible route is required on the **main floor** only.
Doorways	Require minimum 36-inch door and 32-inch clear opening.	Accessible doorways on the main floor, but other requirements are less stringent than Type A.
Maneuvering Space	Ample turning space (typically a 60-inch diameter circle or a T-shaped space) required in various areas, including bathrooms and kitchens.	Require some maneuvering space in the bathroom, but generally less stringent requirements than Type A.
Kitchen	Specific requirements for accessible stoves, clear floor space, and adaptable features like removable base cabinets for knee clearance.	No specific requirements for kitchen accessibility beyond the accessible route on the main floor.
Bathrooms	Detailed requirements for accessible toilets (clearance, grab bar placement), sinks (knee and toe clearance), and bathing facilities (transfer space, grab bars, controls).	Focuses on a usable bathroom on the main floor. This often includes maneuvering space in front of the toilet and sink, but grab bar requirements are less detailed than Type A.
Controls & Outlets	Must be located within accessible reach ranges.	Few specific requirements beyond being accessible on the main floor.
Adaptability	Often includes features designed to be adaptable to meet changing needs (e.g., reinforcement for future grab bar installation, removable cabinets).	Less emphasis on adaptability compared to Type A.