

March 17, 2026

The Honorable Marvin Abney

House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing

82 Smith St., Providence, RI, 02903

SUPPORT H 7564

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H 7564.

My name is Grace Duffy, and I serve as the Policy and Outreach Manager at the [Community Provider Network of Rhode Island](#). I have also lived with a disability since I was eleven years old. I am writing to you today both as an advocate and as someone directly impacted, urging you to take action and pass this critical legislation.

This bill represents more than just a policy - it represents over **three years of intentional work**, collaboration, and outreach. Disability advocates, housing experts, developers, and community members have all been invited for a seat at the table to ensure that this legislation is balanced, feasible, and truly works for all Rhode Islanders.

At its core, H 7564 is built on a simple and fair principle: **publicly funded housing should serve the public**. That includes people with disabilities and our rapidly growing aging population. When taxpayer dollars or public land are used, we have a responsibility to ensure that those homes are usable by the very people who rely on them most.

And the need is undeniable. By 2030, **1 in 4 Rhode Islanders will be seniors**, more than **30% of people 35-65 will become disabled**. Disability is not rare. It is a part of the human experience, whether temporary or lifelong. This bill acknowledges that reality and plans for it.

I want to briefly share why this matters to me personally.

As someone who has used mobility devices, including a wheelchair and walker, I have experienced firsthand what happens when spaces are not designed with accessibility in mind. I



remember being unable to move freely through my own home because of a single step, narrow doorways. These seemingly simple barriers made my home, what is supposed to be a place of safety and refuge, feel more like the world's most impossible obstacle course.

And that is the key point: **these are not complex problems to solve.**

Features like wider doorways, step-free entrances, and accessible bathrooms are simple when included at the start. They allow people to live independently, age in place, and fully participate in their communities.

Opponents often raise concerns about cost - but the data tells a different story.

The Kelsey, a national organization (with roots to RI) committed to advancing house solutions that welcome everyone, has shown that incorporating accessibility features at the design stage **adds no meaningful cost.** In their recent [112-unit development in San Francisco](#), they built units for 14% below the city's average price per unit.

In our own backyard, [Looking Upwards and SAWP, Inc. recently finished construction on 12 new affordable and accessible units in Jamestown](#). This project came in at about \$448,000 per unit, even while going above and beyond accessibility (including even more levels of accessibility than H7564 would require). This price per unit is right in line with, and in some cases much less than, what developers are currently spending per unit in Rhode Island.

So the question becomes: **if it doesn't meaningfully increase costs, and it dramatically increases usability and independence, why *wouldn't* we build this way?**

This bill is also carefully targeted. It applies only to new developments with four or more units that receive state funding or use public land. It also sets reasonable standards, 10% fully accessible units and 25% adaptable units, ensuring flexibility while meaningfully increasing access.

Accessible housing is not just a quality-of-life improvement, it functions as a form of preventive healthcare that can significantly reduce strain on the hospital system. Beyond immediate fall and injury prevention, accessible homes enable adults to live independently, maintain employment, and stay connected to their communities. These improvements also reduce reliance on public benefits and ease caregiver burden, allowing caregivers themselves to



participate in the workforce. Not only is this a thoughtful and balanced policy, it is a balanced policy, and it is a necessary policy.

We have the opportunity to build housing once and build it right.

I respectfully urge you to pass H 7564.

Thank you,

Grace Duffy

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