

Testimony in Support of the Rhode Island Inclusive Home Design Act (26-H 8021)

Chair, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today and for the serious work you do in shaping policies that quietly determine how people actually live. My name is Xueyun Feng, and I am a resident of Providence. I am here today in strong support of 26-H 8021, the Rhode Island Inclusive Home Design Act.

What this bill does is actually very simple, but its impact is structural. The most significant and necessary change in this year's legislation is the expansion of the accessibility requirement. We are moving beyond just new homes constructed with public subsidies to encompass all new single-family construction, townhouse construction, and multi-family construction which does not include an elevator as part of its overall design.

From a policy perspective, this is not only about disability or aging — it is about risk, dignity, and long-term system costs. A home that cannot be entered, navigated, or adapted becomes a barrier the moment life changes: an injury, a parent aging, a child with mobility needs. When housing design ignores these predictable realities, the burden does not disappear — it shifts. It shifts to families, to caregivers, and ultimately to public systems like healthcare and long-term care.

This year's legislation intervenes early, at the design stage, where change is cheapest and most effective. It establishes baseline adaptability by requiring American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Type B standards. Importantly, 26-H 8021 doesn't just set a standard; it ensures accountability by setting up a formal process for resolving disputes and barring local permitting authorities from issuing permits or certificates of occupancy for dwellings that fail to comply.

Requiring these standards in new construction is a preventive policy, not a reactive one. Rhode Island, like many places, is facing demographic transition — an aging population, longer life expectancy, and more people choosing or needing to remain in their homes. Yet most housing stock was not built for longevity. Without policy correction, we are designing homes for only one phase of life, in a society that no longer lives that way.

Some may view this as a building requirement, but I see it more as infrastructure — social infrastructure embedded in physical space. Over time, it will reshape the housing landscape toward inclusion, reduce downstream costs, and expand who our built environment is actually for.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to support and pass 26-H 8021.

Thank you.