

Inclusive Home Design Act in Congress-Housing Bill HR 1408 Offers Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities

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Press Release from Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL)

HOUSING BILL HR 1408 OFFERS ACCESSIBILITY FOR DISABLED Schakowsky Legislation Seeks "Fairness" and "Common Sense" for Mobility-Impaired

WASHINGTON, DC (March 10, 2009) - People with mobility impairments have limited access to most homes constructed with federal assistance because there are currently no federal standards for accessibility features that these homes must include. However, new legislation introduced today by Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-IL, the Inclusive Home Design Act (HR 1408) would greatly increase the number of homes that are accessible for people with disabilities.

"Universal standards for homes built with federal money are long past due," said Rep. Schakowsky. "Implementing accessible features when homes are built is a simple matter of fairness, cost effectiveness, and common sense."

Currently, 95 percent of new single-family homes and townhouses built with federal assistance fail to include any features that make it possible for people with mobility impairments to live in or visit the homes.

The Inclusive Home Design Act, authored by Rep. Schakowsky, aims to increase the residence and accessibility options available to mobility-impaired individuals by employing "visitability" standards. The principles of visitability and inclusive home design seek to create homes that are affordable, sustainable, and utilize a design approach that integrates accessibility features into newly-built homes.

Inclusive standards and incentives have been adopted by at least 44 towns and states, including Chicago, Naperville, and Urbana, Illinois; Atlanta, Georgia; Vermont; Texas; and Kansas. Bolingbrook, IL and Pima County, Arizona have the two most successful laws, requiring that every home built be based on inclusive design. Respectively, over 4,000 and 11,000 homes have been built under their standards with more homes added every day. This legislation builds on that momentum.

Specifically, the Inclusive Home Design Act would require that all newly-built single-family homes and townhouses receiving federal funds meet four specific standards:

- * Include at least one accessible ("zero step") entrance into the home
- * Ensure all doorways on the main floor have a minimum of 32 inches of clear passage space

- * Build at least one wheelchair accessible bathroom on the main floor
- * Place electrical and climate controls (such as light switches and thermostats) at heights reachable from a wheelchair

The legislation applies to new construction, not renovations of existing homes. The average added cost per home for the required features run from \$98 (for homes built on a concrete slab) to \$573 (for homes with a basement or crawl space); however, retrofitting a home can cost several thousand dollars. In multi-story homes, the requirements apply only to the main floor.

Residents who develop disabilities or face age-related mobility problems often face expensive renovations at their own cost or public cost. More often, when renovations are unfeasible, residents live in unsafe conditions or are displaced from their homes into nursing homes. Additionally, disabled people - from children to the elderly and their families - can become socially isolated because architectural barriers in homes prevent them from visiting their friends, neighbors and extended family.

"It makes no sense to build new homes that block people out when it's incredibly easy and cost effective to build new homes that let people in," said Rep. Schakowsky. "We have the ability to increase mobility and improve quality of life for America's disabled; failure to act is a moral crime."

Original Co-Sponsors to the bill include: Sam Farr, Madeleine Bordallo, Jim McGovern, Luis Gutierrez, and Mark Kirk. Also, the legislation is supported by the following 23 groups: Concrete Change, Access Living, ADAPT, American Association of People with Disabilities, American Association on Mental Retardation, American Council of the Blind, American Network of Community Options and Resources, Access to Independence, ARISE, Brain Injury Association of the United States, Congress for the New Urbanism, Disabilities Rights Action Coalition, Easter Seals, Living Independence Network Corporation, Making Choices for Independent Living, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems, National Association of the Councils on Developmental Disabilities, National Council on Independent Living, National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Paralyzed Veterans of America, The Arc of the United States, and United Cerebral Palsy.

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