

Testimony Supporting Raised Bill No. 5372
Committee on Housing
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Submitted by Gayle Kataja, RNC, MS
Member, North Central Disability Advocacy Network

Good afternoon. My name is Gayle Kataja. I am the Regional Director of the North Central Region of Connecticut Community Care, one of three Access Agencies contracted to administer the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders through the Department of Social Services. My office has also signed a memo of understanding with the North Central Area Agency on Aging and Independence Unlimited which outlined the formation the North Central Aging and Disability Resource Partnership. I am member of the North Central Disability Advocacy Network.

I am here today to support Raised Bill 5372, An Act Concerning Accessible Housing. Simply put, the bill makes sense, good common sense. I am here to address a term familiar to some and one that I hope will be universally recognized and accepted. The word is **visitability**. What that means to me and to my friends who use wheelchairs and to my friends and family who are aging is that if I invite you to my home, you can get into my house, you can maneuver the hallways and, if needed, you can use the bathroom. The NC Disability Advocacy Network has spent countless hours researching models around the country and the **visitability** concept and designs are taking hold. We are asking that builders in particular pay special attention to these three features which

would, from my perspective, increase the sale and resale value of homes. We are not asking you to mandate ramps; we are not asking for levered door handles, we are not asking for lowered counter tops. We are asking that every person have the ability to go to the home of anyone they wish. We are asking that new homes have a no step entrance, hallways just a few inches wider and bathroom that could be used by a person using a wheelchair. Life changing events are rarely planned. If you slipped on the ice or fell down the stairs and had to use a wheelchair would you be able to live in your home? You probably could if the **visitability** movement takes hold. Another group would also benefit. All of us here today are older than we were yesterday. Connecticut has more than 500,000 people over the age of 65 and it is estimated that over 40% of them will spend some time in a nursing home. Obviously, that means that carrying out "activities of daily living" could be hindered. Will you be able to live in your home in 5, 10, 20 years? Your chances would be better if **visitability** features were already in place. Thank you for your attention.