

**DEPARTMENT OF SERVICES FOR PERSONS
WITH DISABILITIES**

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Mayor John DeStefano, Jr.

March 4, 2010

Housing Committee
Room 011, Capitol Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Raised Bill #5372

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am writing today on behalf of the residents of New Haven support of Raised Bill #5372 that would give developers the option to make homes they construct visitable by individuals with mobility disabilities.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census 9,655 individuals over the age of 5 have a physical disability and reside in New Haven; 58,234 in New Haven county. This is a large portion of our population that likely has accessibility needs. While the number of individuals with physical disabilities in New Haven is less than 10% of our entire population there is not the same proportion of accessible housing. Most of Connecticut's single family and multifamily housing stock was built prior to any accessibility requirements and remains inaccessible for individuals with disabilities. Unfortunately, because the needs of persons with disabilities were ignored for so long, our current public policy, including the building code, must make up for decades of inaccessible construction.

For individuals with disabilities that my office has assisted in finding accessible housing, they frequently encounter a six month to over two year search accessible housing. This is not an uncommon scenario around the state of Connecticut and other disability support organizations report similar waiting periods for accessible housing. We expect this will only get worse as more individuals acquire a disability as our population ages and injured veterans. This bill may improve these options for individuals needing minimal access.

In 1999, the City of New Haven conducted a comprehensive survey of our disability community. We asked survey participants if they felt the City of New Haven had enough accessible housing for people with disabilities and only 21.9% felt that we have enough accessible housing. 12.5% of the survey participants stated that they had difficulty finding accessible housing. Approximately 10% of survey participants report that their current housing has

Approximately 10% of survey participants report that their current housing has been modified to accommodate their disability and 74% stated that these modifications were made after moving in to their housing. Four percent of the funding for modifications came from state agencies, seven percent were paid for by general assistance and 19% of the modifications were paid by family members.

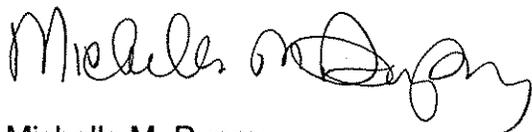
Based on the information above, when individuals with disabilities are forced to rent or buy inaccessible dwelling units and must modify them, many look to state funded programs for the modifications. Therefore, increasing the stock of accessible housing may actually save the state money if individuals are not forced to use state programs to modify inaccessible or adaptable housing units. Additionally, the state of Connecticut has a very active policy to move individuals from state funded beds in nursing home to a community setting with appropriate supports. Individuals moving out of nursing homes will more likely need accessible housing. The State's policy ultimately creates a greater demand for accessible housing and this bill helps meet that demand.

Visitable homes also have other benefits for the community. It allows individuals with disabilities to visit family and friends more readily. It creates a more integrated community. And one of the biggest benefits is it gives people with mobility disabilities in an emergency, when they must evacuate their homes, an option to stay with family or friends with a visitable home instead of an emergency shelter where there are little supports for their needs.

While the City of New Haven supports visitability efforts in this bill, I must emphasize that it is critical that tax revenue for the local communities should not be lost as a result of this initiative and associated incentives. Any plan the relies on payment in lieu of taxes must be funded 100% to insure no negative impact is felt by local communities and cannot be subject to change or diminution by future legislative acts or budgetary constraints.

Please feel free to contact me if I can provide any further assistance in this matter.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle M. Duprey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michelle" being the most prominent part.

Michelle M. Duprey