

Commission on Disability Issues

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OPINION OF THE MIAMI-DADE COMMISSION ON DISABILITY ISSUES

RE: To support in concept H. R. 5683, the `Inclusive Home Design Act of 2002, which is also known as Visitability

- People with disabilities should have the same opportunity to visit their family and friends as people without disabilities.
- While the concept of Visitability is a good step in the right direction, it does not go far enough.
- People with disabilities should also have the opportunity to find accessible or adaptable housing with the same range of choices of location, housing type, and price range as others enjoy.
- The federal Fair Housing Act recognizes the need for accessible housing and addresses that need by requiring that, in multi-family dwellings, all units on the first floor or served by an elevator be adaptable for use by persons with disabilities.
- Multi family homes with less than four units, and single family homes, were exempted from the adaptability requirements due in part to an age old concept that a person building a home to live in should have freedom of choice.
- In truth, only a very small percentage of homes are built and lived in by original owners. Most homes are built by developers, or on speculation, or are bought from previous owners. In all of those cases, the buyer has little choice in the design.
- There are numerous requirements for single-family homes, not related to accessibility, that take into consideration the needs of the community and the protection of future owners.
- Still, nearly all homes that are being built are not accessible to or adaptable for people with disabilities.
- The cost to provide accessibility or adaptability in new construction is minimal, while retrofitting for accessibility is generally very expensive or infeasible.
- It is extremely difficult for people with disabilities to find accessible living quarters to buy or rent.

- With the onset of new urbanism, and traditional neighborhood development plans, fewer living units in new developments are covered by the Fair Housing new construction requirements.
- Besides providing a place where a person with a permanent disability can live, an accessible home is safer, allows access for an owner with a temporary disability, and allows interaction with family members and friends with disabilities.
- A larger percentage of elder persons have disabilities, and the percentage of elder persons in our population is rapidly increasing.
- Medical care costs and medical insurance costs have risen tremendously and hospital beds are often at a premium. At the same time, there are people staying in hospitals and nursing homes simply because they need accessibility that they do not have at home.

Therefore: The Commission on Disability Issues of Miami-Dade County, Florida, supports the concept of visitability, and would like to have this concept extended to include the standards of adaptability set forth in the Fair Housing Act.