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## Addressing the Importance of Accessibility for Newly Constructed Dwelling Units

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# Addressing the Importance of Accessibility for Newly Constructed Dwelling Units

## Maria Ducci - WVU School of Music



### WV Senate Bill 148

The purpose of this bill is to require all newly constructed, state assisted, detached single family houses, townhouses or multilevel dwelling units (whether detached or attached to other units or structures), or ground-floor units in a building of three or fewer dwelling units to meet minimum standards of universal design for persons with disabilities.

### Support for Senate Bill 148

I am in support of Senate Bill 148 that requires all newly constructed dwelling units to meet minimum standards of universal design for persons with disabilities. I have taken such a position on this matter because it addresses the idea of caring in the political sphere, a setting in which care is not often prevalent, through acknowledging the importance of inclusivity, special needs, and accessibility in the public context.

**This bill indirectly protects persons with disabilities from being denied opportunities and/or resources based on limited accessibility.**

In other words, without accessible housing options located near important resources needed by individuals with disabilities (hospitals, clinics, rehab facilities, pharmacies), their overall access to such resources may be unfairly limited.

“I have conducted research as an undergraduate student, which directly incorporated and worked with individuals with disabilities. I have seen the obstacles and difficulties faced by the program team when planning such practices and performances which require wheelchair accessible spaces, for example theaters and theater stages. The supported bill would extend DDA requirements to all newly built dwelling units.”

### Summary Statement

Already being enforced in West Virginia are laws for DDA parking, independent living facilities, ASL interpreters, adaptive visual technologies, supported employment, fair elections, and accessible university campuses, among others. It is important that in the demographic setting of disability in WV, we acknowledge this same need for accessibility in the construction of new dwelling places. Additionally, coming from my chosen career path and research projects that I have worked on, it has become obvious to me that there is a general lack of understanding about disability in the state. To combat this, I would suggest more education on the topic being offered in schools as well as inclusive program opportunities to support interaction with this population in the community.

**Senate Bill 148 adequately acknowledges the current disabled ratio of West Virginia residents and responds in an appropriate manner to meet the present needs.**

In recent years, West Virginia has had the highest disabled population in the nation. To put it into perspective, that is 1 in 5 individuals in the state. Over half of those with a disability have an ambulatory (walking) ailment, are unemployed, or have been diagnosed with depression or other mental health issue. West Virginia also has the third highest rate of senior citizens in the US; 2 of every 5 individuals over age 65 are disabled.

Disabled individuals also possess differing statistic rates of employment, earnings, poverty, education, and health insurance coverage, from what is standard for the typically functioning population (“Homepage | Annual Disability Statistics Compendium”). This bill acknowledges such statistical discrepancies and works to alleviate limited dwelling unit accessibility, specifically.

**Bill 148 provides an expanded standard of residency construction that increases potential for future sale to the entire market, including those individuals with disabilities.**

Three main elements influencing the resale value of DDA modified homes include the location, type of modification, and future potential buyer. For example, value will increase if the housing space is located in a region with a large number of disabled or older adults, or if the area is one that people often move to for retirement. Only if the type of modification made interrupts the function or cohesive level of the space, might it hinder the value to future buyers. Lastly, accessible homes are being considered of high value particularly to buyers belonging to the baby boomer generation, and also those within the ages of 35 to 55 (Homes for Sale | MLS Listings | Houses for Sale | Home Search - HomeCity Real Estate”).