

To: The Honorable Nancy W. Cook and the Honorable Dennis P. Williams and
The Joint Finance Committee

From: The Developmental Disabilities Council

Date: February 3, 2010

Subject: Affordable Accessible Housing

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you on the shortage of affordable accessible housing in Delaware.

The Delaware State Needs Assessment, 2008 – 2012, states that Delaware’s population will grow by 19% by 2015 and by 33% by 2030. Also, Delaware’s population, ages 65 – 74, will increase by 18.4% from 2005 – 2010 and by 24.8% from 2010 – 2015. At a workshop this past January 25, Secretary Rita Landgraf stated that there are currently 184,000 people over age 60 in Delaware. She also said the older population in Delaware will double from the year 2000 to 2025. A recent Division of Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities (DSAAPD) publication entitled, “Caring Today, Preparing for Tomorrow” stated that, by this year, 2010, Delaware’s over 60 population will increase more than 30% adding more than 45,000 residents and by 2020 more than 25% of all Delawareans will be 60 or over. The above mentioned DSAAPD publication also stated nearly one in six residents in Delaware have a disability and more than one-in-three seniors age 65 and older have one or more types of disabilities and are living in the community. We know that the State’s population of people with disabilities will increase proportionately as the State’s population increases. That fact, along with the increase in senior citizens, means there will be a proportionate increase in the need for affordable accessible housing. There is currently a shortage of that housing in Delaware. Affordable accessible housing is the key for our citizens with disabilities and our aging population to enjoy the same quality of life as the rest of our citizens.

One problem that currently exists in solving this issue is that federal laws, The Americans with Disabilities Act and the Fair Housing Act, only require that 5% of the houses in projects built with federal money be accessible. That means 95% of the houses built with taxpayers’ money are not usable by people with mobility impairments. The federal laws only address housing of 5 units and up. There is nothing at the federal level at present to address housing of four units down to single family homes.

Universal Design is a building philosophy that will help solve the problem of not enough affordable accessible housing in Delaware. Universal Design is housing for the lifespan of all people. The intent of universal design is to simplify life for everyone by making more housing usable by more people at little or no extra cost. The market for universal design includes everyone at some point in their lives, and the movement toward universal design in housing becomes more viable as our population ages.

An effort to increase the stock of affordable accessible housing is being made at the national level by a bill introduced by Rep. Jan Schakowski, (D, IL). It is H.R. 1408, the Inclusive Home Design Act of 2009. This bill requires all newly constructed, federally assisted single family houses and town houses to include at least 1) a no step entry; 2) accessible interior doors; 3) accessible environmental controls and 4) accessible habitable space with an accessible bathroom on the first floor.

The Universal Design Coalition, an organization made up of builders, disabilities organizations and housing advocates understands that the Governor's recommended budget includes over 8.5 million dollars for affordable housing. The Developmental Disabilities Council and the Universal Design Coalition request that the housing funds help to support accessible, affordable and safe housing that utilizes universal design.

Universal design costs very little extra if you build a house from scratch and it eliminates the need for costly renovations when an inhabitant develops a mobility impairment and can't negotiate steps either from an injury, surgery, old age or a disability. Universal Design "Just Makes Sense".

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to discuss this very important issue with you.