

February 18, 2021

Representative Julie Fahey, Chair
House Housing Committee
900 Court St. NE, HR D
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Fahey and Members of the Committee,

As the Age-Friendly Cities program manager for the City of Portland, I am writing in support of HB 2336, which is intended to clarify rules on visitability standards by adding the American National Standards Institute definition of “Type C” units to the Oregon Residential Specialty Code. Visitability currently exists in Oregon’s Commercial Structures Code and adding the language to the residential code will provide consistency in our statewide standards.

This testimony is offered as part of an age-friendly framework as age-friendly efforts aim to create places where people of all races, ages, and abilities can thrive.¹ Oregon was home to the first U.S. age-friendly city initiative when Portland joined the World Health Organization’s global age-friendly project in 2006. Today, Oregon has eight communities championing age friendly initiatives from Ashland to Multnomah County; nationally, there are 507 age-friendly communities and counting.

HB 2336 is important as our state’s older population is growing rapidly; according to Oregon’s Office of Economic Analysis there will be 40% more older adults in 2030 than in 2018.² As such, we must provide Oregonians with appropriate housing and environments so that they can thrive. HB 2336 addresses one area of need, accessible housing. As reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, “the demand for homes with aging-accessible features will rise” in the future; the report notes that only 10% of homes in the U.S. and Pacific West were considered appropriate for aging individuals and people with mobility impairments.

Although visitability is not a “silver bullet” for addressing our accessible housing needs, it is low cost, high return approach that has been embraced by dozens of communities and states in the U.S. Visitable design is good for everyone, including older adults, people with disabilities, and families. HB 2336 will serve as an additional tool, not a mandate, that provides local officials with the clear and objective standards needed to advance local age-friendly and housing accessibility efforts locally.

Sincerely,

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¹ De Monnin, J. (2020). AARP Oregon, Older Adults Help Oregon’s Economy. Retrieved from: <https://states.aarp.org/oregon/older-adults-help-oregons-economy>.

² State of Oregon (2019). Office of Economic Analysis, Oregon’s Demographic Trends. Retrieved from: https://www.oregon.gov/das/OEA/Documents/OR_pop_trend2019.pdf.