



Senate Committee on Housing & Development

Testimony in Support of SB 444

Andrea Meyer, Director of Government Relations

February 5, 2025

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50+ to choose how they live as they age. AARP Oregon advocates on issues important to our 500,000 Oregon members with a focus on health security, financial resilience and livable communities.

AARP is pleased to support SB 444 and urges the committee's endorsement of this bill, which aims to enhance accessibility and inclusivity in housing across our state, particularly in state-funded affordable housing developments.

A key aspect of our mission is promoting livable and age-friendly communities, which includes expanding housing options and ensuring that Oregonians have safe, affordable, accessible, and appropriate housing as they age. Oregon's population is aging rapidly, with the number of residents aged 75-79 projected to more than double in the next 20 years. As we grow older, the prevalence of disabilities also increases. According to the National Disability Institute, 6% of young adults aged 18-20 have a disability, compared with 22% of adults aged 61-65. As we live longer, we often face chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, back pain, and arthritis, which can lead to functional limitations over time.

Additionally, the intersection of income and age reveals that inadequate nutrition, poor healthcare, stressful or unsafe working conditions, and other risk factors increase the likelihood of disability over a person's lifespan. Data also shows that racial disparities in disability rates widen with age. At ages 18-20, 7% of African Americans have a disability compared to 6% of Non-Hispanic Whites. But by ages 61-65, disability rates increase to 30% among African Americans compared to 20% among Non-Hispanic Whites.

Despite the growing need for accessible housing, less than 4% of current housing stock is accessible. With housing insecurity and homelessness on the rise among older adults, the state's investment in low-income and affordable housing is critical. It is equally crucial that state-funded housing is designed to be accessible. SB 444 offers Oregon a unique opportunity to address the mismatch between the types of housing we need and what currently exists and is being produced.

Firstly, the requirement for 10% of housing built with state funds to comply with the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS) is a significant and necessary measure. This will ensure that new affordable housing developments are accessible to individuals with disabilities, promoting independence and equality. By adhering to UFAS, we can create a more inclusive community where everyone has the opportunity to live comfortably and safely.

Secondly, increasing the building code requirements for Type A units from 2% to 10% is a vital improvement. Type A units are designed to be more accessible and adaptable. By raising this requirement, we will address the current shortage of accessible housing and plan for the future needs of our aging population and individuals with disabilities.

Lastly, decreasing the number of units that trigger Fair Housing design and construction requirements from 4 to 3 is a practical adjustment. This change will ensure that smaller housing projects also meet accessibility standards, thereby expanding the availability of accessible housing options across the state.

The provisions proposed in SB 444 are commonsense measures, especially since they apply to state-funded projects. It is only logical that taxpayer-funded housing should center the needs of the people and reflect the changing demographics of our state.

SB 444 represents a crucial step towards ensuring that all Oregonians, regardless of their age or physical abilities, have access to safe and accessible homes that fit their needs.

On behalf of AARP, we urge you to support this bill and help us build more age-friendly, equitable, and inclusive communities for all Oregonians.

Sources:

- https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/reports/files/Harvard_JCHS_Housing_Americas_Older_Adults_2023.pdf
- <https://www.nationaldisabilityinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/disability-race-poverty-in-america.pdf>
- <https://www.oregon.gov/das/oea/Documents/demographic.pdf>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2024/s0716-Adult-disability.html>
- <https://www.oregon.gov/odhs/data/Pages/apd-data.aspx>
- <https://futureofhousing.aarp.org/>