

Dear Chair Pham, Vice-Chair Anderson, and Members of the Senate Committee on Housing and Development,

My name is Scott Lemons. I work within Oregon's Independent Living (IL) network and in housing and community-based services, and I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 1576.

From an Independent Living perspective, SB 1576 addresses a core housing supply problem that local governments, housing providers, and disability-serving organizations encounter statewide: Oregon does not have enough accessible housing, and what does exist is rarely aligned with affordability.

Although federal laws such as the Fair Housing Act establish accessibility requirements, they do not ensure that accessible units are actually produced at the scale needed. Fair Housing enforcement is largely complaint-driven and reactive. It does not shape housing supply, nor does it prevent public funds from being used to build housing that many Oregonians with disabilities cannot use.

SB 1576 fills that gap by embedding accessibility directly into Oregon's building code and into the conditions attached to publicly subsidized housing. This is not duplicative of federal law—it is how accessibility standards are operationalized at the state level, where housing codes and funding decisions actually determine what gets built.

The need for this bill is becoming more urgent as pressure on affordable housing continues to increase. Recent federal reductions and instability in rental assistance programs, including Section 8, have intensified competition for already scarce affordable units. People with disabilities - many of whom rely on fixed incomes and rental assistance - are disproportionately impacted when accessible units are limited or nonexistent.

Local jurisdictions increasingly turn to Centers for Independent Living when residents with disabilities cannot find housing that meets basic accessibility needs. But CILs cannot resolve a supply shortage through navigation or advocacy alone. Without enforceable standards tied to new construction and public investment, the problem persists regardless of coordination efforts.

SB 1576 ensures that accessibility is treated as a baseline feature of new subsidized housing rather than an exception. Integrating accessibility into affordable housing supports stable tenancy, reduces displacement, and strengthens the overall housing system by ensuring that publicly funded developments serve the full range of Oregonians who need them. It also reduces preventable injuries, avoids unnecessary institutionalization, and supports community-based living—outcomes that align with Oregon's housing, health, and fiscal policy goals while reducing long-term public costs.

Accessible housing is not a niche issue—it is fundamental housing infrastructure. SB 1576 aligns Oregon's housing development practices with real-world demand and long-term sustainability.

I urge the Committee to support SB 1576.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Scott Lemons