



Testimony
Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security
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January 11, 2022

Regarding An Act relative to expanding the availability of adaptable housing for consumers with disabilities, mobility impairments, and seniors
H. 2420

Chairman Timilty, Chairman Gonzalez, and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations (MACDC). I am writing to offer our support, with one qualification (described below) to H. 2420: *An Act relative to expanding the availability of adaptable housing for consumers with disabilities, mobility impairments, and seniors*, sponsored by Rep. Christine P. Barber and Rep. Michael J. Moran.

MACDC is an association of mission-driven community-based organizations dedicated to working together and with others to create opportunities for people of diverse incomes and backgrounds to access housing that is affordable, benefit from economic opportunities, and fully participate in the civic life of their communities.

Everyone deserves to live, work, and participate in their community. The best way for older adults and people with disabilities to live full and safe lives is to build housing that can be adapted to meet their changing needs. Older multifamily buildings undergoing a gut rehab, and adaptive reuse of buildings into housing, offer opportunities to adopt the modest measures needed for people with disabilities or senior to age in place, or in one's community. However, existing law does not allow the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB) to promulgate regulations regarding either adaptability or "visitability" requirements for buildings constructed before 3/13/91.

The bill requires that when there is an ***adaptive reuse development*** (non-residential building being converted to housing) ***or*** when there is ***a multifamily residential building that is vacant and being gut rehabbed***, then adaptability requirements apply in:

- All dwelling units within buildings with elevators;
- All ground floor dwelling units in buildings without elevators; and
- In public use and common use portions of such buildings.

As noted above, there is one qualification to our endorsement of this bill. The bill amends MGL Chapter 22, Section 13A, which includes the following definition of Multiple Dwelling: "a lodging or residential facility for hire, rent, lease or sale, containing three or more dwelling units." MACDC supports the additional requirements in the proposed legislation for buildings containing five or more dwelling units.

In communities across the Commonwealth, especially in those with weaker real estate markets, it's important to incentivize prospective purchasers of vacant and distressed 3-4 family properties to acquire these properties, rehabilitate them, and turn these blighted properties into quality housing. Absent economies of scale, responsible purchasers may be less likely to acquire these small properties. Furthermore, this bill would, for some of these very small properties, require modifications to provide access to the building entrances- which, depending on the site and current entry, could be, on a per unit basis, quite expensive. We have communicated this concern to those advocating for the bill's passage

That said, for multifamily properties with 5 or more units, we feel the benefits of the bill in increasing housing options for all people, regardless of age or disability, clearly outweigh any additional costs associated with it. We therefore enthusiastically support enactment of the provisions in the bill for multifamily buildings of five or more units.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at joek@macdc.org, or at 617-379-5922.