

FAIR HOUSING OF THE DAKOTAS

(Formerly the North Dakota Fair Housing Council)

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Position Statement on Visitability of the Fair Housing of the Dakotas

Affordable, accessible, visitable housing for all is a common goal. North and South Dakota need adequate housing for all its citizens before its goals for employment and independent living can be achieved. This means that North and South Dakota must participate in federal subsidized housing programs to the maximum extent possible, give accessibility requirements enforcement power, and pass legislation requiring visitability in all new publicly financed housing projects.

Even if accessibility requirements in multi-family housing units are enforced, they would still not meet the accessibility needs by the disability community. Builders of single family houses continue to construct barriers that exclude people with mobility impairments, both as residents and visitors. Currently, only 5% of new single-family homes and townhouses financially assisted by the U.S. federal government provide any access features that permit people with mobility impairments to visit or reside in the homes. The remaining 95% are constructed with public money and create new, unnecessary architectural barriers.

A new concept in home design, called *Visitability*, can provide basic access for all to new homes. We recommend building visitability into publicly financed, single family houses on the national, state and local levels. We define visitability as at least:

- Providing at least one zero-step entrance,
- All main floor interior doors--including bathrooms--with 32 inches of clear passage space and hallways no less than 36 inches in width on the ground floor,
- Providing one accessible bathroom on the ground floor, and
- Placing light switches, electric outlets and other controls at reachable heights.

Studies indicate that incorporating these features in new construction usually adds less than 1% to the purchase price and does not significantly change the design. VISIBLE homes are also built for residents without disabilities. VISIBLE homes enable owners to invite friends, neighbors and relatives with disabilities to enjoy life's activities in the home. North and South Dakota should require visitability for all new public housing and stop the practice of building homes that are not accessible to persons with disabilities. We support legislation which broadens the inventory of accessible homes in North and South Dakota and encourage all housing, whether publicly or privately funded, to incorporate visitability features.

This position statement was adopted by the Fair Housing of the Dakotas Board of Directors on August 13, 2007 and revised November 15, 2007.

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