

# FAIR HOUSING OF THE DAKOTAS

(Formerly the North Dakota Fair Housing Council)

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## HOUSING FOR DAKOTANS: AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE, AND VISITABLE

### Position Statement of the Fair Housing of the Dakotas

**THE PROBLEM:** Being part of the community and living as independently as possible are among the most important values and goals shared by North and South Dakotans. A home of one's own, either rented or owned, is the cornerstone of independence. However, across the Dakotas, too many individuals and families face a crisis in the availability of affordable, accessible, and visitable housing.

**I CAN'T AFFORD IT:** Many people with disabilities face monthly rent charges that exceed their income. *Priced Out in 2004* reports that the federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) monthly payment is \$564 for an annual income of \$6,768. As a national average, a person receiving SSI would need to pay 109.6% of his/her monthly income to rent a modest one-bedroom apartment.

**I CAN'T LIVE IN IT:** Current available housing includes barriers for people who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices. Finding housing with even basic accessibility features, such as an entrance with no steps, can be impossible. Public housing units often do not meet the space requirements needed by people with disabilities. People are often forced into nursing homes simply for want of a ramp into their homes.

**I CAN'T VISIT IT:** Builders of single family houses construct barriers that exclude people with mobility impairments, both as residents and visitors. Residents who develop disabilities often face expensive renovations at their own cost or public cost. When renovations are unfeasible, residents often live in unsafe conditions or are displaced from their homes into institutions. People with disabilities and their families can be socially isolated because architectural barriers in homes prevent them from visiting their friends, neighbors and extended family.

### **THE FIX:**

**MAKE IT AFFORDABLE:** North and South Dakota state governments should encourage maximum use of federal housing subsidies, both by local housing authorities and by housing state agencies, particularly where subsidies are made available specifically to promote the integration of nursing home residents into the community. This includes encouragement of participation by housing authorities in Section 8 voucher homeownership programs. Participation in such programs would lessen the future dependence on public housing by consumers.

**MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE:** Whether a person can stay at home with the assistance of a home modification depends on where in North or South Dakota that person lives. In more rural areas, the chances are less likely they will receive funding to make their home accessible. Yet, often, home modification programs would work best in rural areas because the market value tends to be much more affordable than in urban areas. Both North and South Dakota need a uniform statewide home modification fund to ensure that no one, regardless of where they live, will have to leave home because of inaccessibility. Builders need to construct larger, more livable accessible units in response to public need. And, state governments should enforce Federal Fair Housing Act requirements and enforce federal laws which require 5% of all new multi-family housing units developed with public money be accessible for people with disabilities.

**MAKE IT VISITABLE:** Single family houses which are built with public money, or renovated with public money, should contain basic visitability elements. Visitability means 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.

*This position statement was adopted by the Fair Housing of the Dakotas Board of Directors on February 25, 2008. (P076)*

