

## **House Housing, Military and General Affairs Testimony on S.176**

Good afternoon, my name is Sarah Launderville and I am the executive director of the Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL) Thank you for the invitation to testify today on S.176.

VCIL is a statewide nonprofit organization serving people with disabilities. A couple of our programs touch upon accessibility including the Community Access Program where our Civil Rights team provides technical assistance and trainings to the community including businesses, employers, those in the housing field, and municipalities on the Americans with Disabilities Act, Fair Housing and other disability related laws.

VCIL also administers the Home Access Program which provides grant funding for entrance and bathroom modifications for low income individuals with disabilities. At this time there are 64 people on the HAP waiting list. The wait time for individuals applying today is approximately two years. There is only two exceptions in which an individual can move ahead of others and that is if the person is at risk of going into a nursing home, or if they have leveraged funding for the project. Funding for this program comes from state funds administered by the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board.

The Home Access Program receives approximately two calls per month from individuals who are not eligible for the program because their household income exceeds the program income limits. The income limits are listed above is also on the VCIL website, so some individuals may look at the income thresholds and not make a call to the program at all.

VCIL is in support of S.176 allowing for a “written disclosure to a prospective buyer detailing whether the residential construction is in compliance with the standards”.

According to the DAIL Results Based Accountability Scorecard <https://app.resultsscorecard.com/Scorecard/Embed/8865> released in the DAIL FY2015 Annual Report there are indicators related to home accessibility that we believe this bill can be a factor in showing positive results.

Indicators include:

- Percentage of Vermonters age 60+ served by Choices for Care who were in a Home and Community Based setter rather than a nursing facility.
- Fall-related death rate per 100,000 adults age 65 and older
- Number of Choices for Care Home and Community Based participants who are satisfied with their contact with family and friends. (this number decreased by 1% in 2015)

VCIL uses Results Based Accountability for our program development and has indicators of increasing accessible housing stock in Vermont and providing training to contractors and others on accessibility standards.

Based on data from the past year, VCIL spends on average \$10,000 per household on entrance and bathroom modifications. Below is a chart of the average cost of home modification by type:

<b>Type of Modification</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>
Ramp	\$8,000
Bathroom	\$12,000
Stair Glide	\$10,000
Small device modification	\$1,000
Kitchen modification	\$25,000
Accessible walkway	\$15,000

These averages include the labor of a professional contractor, meaning the cost will vary depending on if the household uses volunteer labor to complete a project. The importance of this is that it cost more to build in adaptability features from the beginning instead of providing access rehabilitation at a later date.

We know that after the "visitability" bill passed new construction residential homes were to meet adaptability standards in which people with disabilities could "visit" one another as laid out in S.176, but tracking if that is actually happening is an issue. We hear stories which lead us to believe that builders/developers are not complying with the law.

For years VCIL has advocated for more housing stock to be accessible so individuals have access in their own homes, or age in place but also be able to visit the homes of others. When the "visitability" bill passed VCIL was encouraged that the accessible and adaptable housing stock in the state would increase. We believe that having a sign off will increase awareness about the law and potentially additional compliance. By creating accessible housing stock at the beginning of a project, the potential for saving additional cost for a modification is greater.

Through our work we also hear from individuals with disabilities that they are not often able to visit their family and friends because the homes of people they are visiting are not accessible. If we begin to collect the data outlined in S.176 we will be able to address where we need to put more energy and education into the existing law and make positive strides in indicators identified by the state and those working on improving the housing stock available to people with disabilities, elders and their families and friends.

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