

4/8/2015 Safely Aging in Place in Vermont: Reducing Falls, Reducing Health Expenditures

## ***H.238 An Act creating an income tax credit for home modifications required by a disability or physical hardship***

**Sponsors:** Representatives Robert Krebs, Patsy French & William Frank

### **What is the purpose of H.238?**

For Vermont seniors and individuals of any age with disabling health conditions, everyday living environments can interfere with mobility, safety and productivity. Home modification investments can make the difference between living independently at home and avoiding or delaying costly institutionalization. This legislation would offer an option to “age in place” more safely and independently in the form of a state funded income tax credit. This credit would allow up to a maximum of \$ 9,000 for making accessible modifications to one’s home. The initial modest reduction in state revenue would be offset by significant savings achieved through the reduction of falls resulting in visits to the ER, hospitalizations and rehab stays, and outpatient therapy, the costs for which are borne in part by the state. H. 238 is a viable option in reducing the state’s budget deficit.

### **What do typical home modifications cost?**

According to the Center for Universal Design, home modifications can range in price from \$100 to \$50,000. The expense of modifications can be prohibitive for many individuals already bearing additional costs of aging or disabling conditions. Modifications can be as simple as installing a grab bar in the shower or much costlier structural changes to the home such as widening doorways or building a ramp, installing a stair lift or an accessible bathroom. An accessible home can help conserve energy, increase efficiency in daily tasks, and lessen the likelihood of dangerous falls.

### **Why do Vermonters need this tax assistance?**

Vermont’s elder population is growing rapidly. In 2009, there were 129,139 state residents over the age of 65, as compared to 101,827 in 2000. In 2013, Vermont was already the 2nd oldest state based on median age. In 2009 Health Department data showed 118 deaths, 1657 hospitalizations, 5445 ER visits, and a total annual hospitalization cost of \$39,400,000 related to falls. More Vermont elders die from fall related injuries than in auto accidents. In Vermont the combination of an old housing stock, lack of affordable, accessible housing options, projected aging demographics of those 65 and older threatens overall quality of life and guarantees an unavoidable crisis. The Vermont Center for Independent Living and National MS Society provide some financial assistance to qualified applicants, especially those with lower incomes, but perennial waiting lists exist, and this assistance does not always cover the full costs of modifications.

### **Can Vermont afford a tax credit in this current economic climate?**

Yes!!! Faced with a \$100 million dollar budget deficit, policy makers cannot afford to ignore any measure that can help close this gap! According to the *Vermont State-Specific Data from the Genworth 2013 Cost of Care Survey*, the Vermont median annual nursing home rate is \$97,090. H.238 strikes a fair balance between cost to the individual and cost to the state. Documentation of modifications will be required. The proposed credit is “non-refundable” and can be carried over in subsequent years, and the amount of the credit is calculated on a sliding scale depending on income. The legislature has discretion to place a total cap on the credit if the undefined fiscal impact is of over-arching concern as states like Virginia have done. Advocates recognize the feasibility in this win-win approach. To continue to enjoy life safely and independently in one’s community amidst Vermont’s majestic beauty and serenity is a gift Vermont can truly afford to give its most vulnerable citizens.

**SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS: TURN OVER OR SEE PAGE 2**

**For additional information contact The National MS Society [michelle.dickson@nmss.org](mailto:michelle.dickson@nmss.org)**

## **Supporting Organizations: Listed Alphabetically**

- **AARP-Vermont**
- **Disability Rights Center Vermont**
- **National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Greater New England Chapter**
- **New England Paralyzed Veterans of America**
- **Vermont Association of Area Agencies on Aging**
- **Vermont Center for Independent Living**
- **Vermont Statewide Independent Living Council**