

Wednesday, January 17, 2024

The Honorable Emilie Kornheiser  
Chair, House Committee on Ways and Means  
115 State Street Montpelier, VT 05633

**Re: H.610- An act relating to making home modifications for safety and livability**

Dear Chair Kornheiser, Vice Chair Canfield, and members of the House Committee on Ways and Means,

As a resident of Vermont and someone who has been impacted by ALS and the cost of home modifications, I urge you to swiftly move H.610 through your committee.

ALS is a fatal, progressive neurodegenerative disease with no known cures. ALS robs a person of their ability to walk, talk, eat, and finally breathe, usually within 2-5 years of their diagnosis. ALS can strike anyone at any time, and throughout the course of their illness, people with ALS need significant medical care, which can easily exceed \$250,000 a year. In addition, the cost of making a home more accessible for someone living with ALS can be incredibly burdensome, costing thousands of dollars depending on the needs of the home and person.

H.610 would allow an individual to receive a tax credit of up to \$15,000 of qualified expenses in their lifetime with the purpose of helping individuals live more safely in their homes. Qualifying expenses refer to unreimbursed and uncovered expenses relating to modifications of a homestead to enhance safety and livability, such as: ramps, lifts, widened doorways and hallways, bathroom renovation, and other modifications specifically made to improve accessibility or safety.

The cost of making a home more accessible can be incredibly burdensome, costing thousands of dollars depending on the needs of the home and person. Below is an overview of common home modifications and their average cost, according to Disability Partnerships.

- Wheelchair ramps: \$400 - \$4000
- Roll-under sinks: \$500
- Grab bars (or safety rails): \$140
- Doorway/hallway widening: \$700 (each)
- Stair lifts: \$3000 - \$4000
- Curb-free (or wheel-in) showers: \$5000 - \$6000
- Lowered kitchen cabinets/appliances: \$15,000

When my father was diagnosed with ALS in June 2021, he was still walking, golfing, and playing with his grandchildren, but we knew that would be soon coming to an end. As the only bedrooms and full bath were on the second floor of his home, home modifications were imperative. The only saving grace was that my father was a Vietnam Veteran and he had the opportunity to tap into the Department of Veterans Affairs Special Adapted Housing Grant in the amount of \$100,200 to convert a den into a full ADA bedroom and bathroom. If only everyone suffering from this horrendous disease had access to such, as without it, my family would not have been able to afford this expense. Luckily, due to the kindness of extended family members, we were able to do the floor plans and elevations that the VA required for the grant. After 3 months of waiting for approval with some back and forth in the meantime, my father was approved for the grant and construction was able to begin in January 2022. In the meantime, my family installed grab bars wherever possible and a stair lift so that he could safely access the second floor after a few too many falls. Home modifications were essential to his safety, among other items outside the scope of this bill. Unfortunately and sadly, my father was hospitalized in April 2022 and passed away at the end of May that year, and he did not live to see the completed work. My father died 11 months after his ALS diagnosis.

If enacted, Vermont would join 8 other states, including 2 of Vermont's neighbors, who provide tax credits for home modifications: Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Missouri, New Hampshire, and Virginia. This legislation would impact people living with ALS who modify their homes in response to their diagnosis, as well as anyone in the state who is interested in making their home more accessible, which has long-term positive impacts on Vermont's overall housing market. The financial impact on people living with ALS and other diseases that require modifying a home would be significant and would incentivize these families to invest in making their homes safer to live in.

For these reasons, I ask for the committee's attention and support on H.610 and hope to see a favorable report.

Sincerely,

**Danelle Lello Birong**

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