



House Bill 405  
Proponent Testimony  
Jennifer Kucera, Chairwoman

Chairman Roemer, Ranking Member Troy, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, my name is Jennifer Kucera and I currently serve as the Chairwoman of the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council. I want to thank you for affording me the opportunity to present testimony in support of House Bill 405, a bill that seeks to increase the availability of accessible housing in Ohio.

The Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council is a public body created by the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act. The members of our Council are adults with developmental disabilities, family members and guardians of individuals with developmental disabilities, and state agency representatives and other stakeholder organizations that serve individuals with developmental disabilities. The DD Council supports any effort to improve accessibility in housing in Ohio.

According to the American Community Survey, there were more than 1.6 million Ohioans with a disability in 2022. Broken down by disability type, roughly half of all people reporting a disability in Ohio indicated they had an ambulatory disability. This is the largest disability subgroup in the state.

House Bill 405 proposes to provide a one-time tax credit capped at \$5,000 for existing homes to be modified for accessibility. The bill uses the term universal visitability, which we believe is a combination of two widely accepted but different terms: universal design and visitability. Visitability is a term used to describe a specific set of accessibility features, such as a zero-step entrance, doorways that have a net-clear width of 32 inches and hallways with a 36 inch clearance, and a bathroom on the main floor with enough floor space for a person in a wheelchair to enter and use without being encroached upon by the closure of the bathroom door. Universal design is a more expansive approach to accessibility, touching on all aspects of a home's design and construction to ensure that it is usable by a person in a wheelchair as well as all other people. Universal design could address things like varying counter heights, access to upper cabinets, faucet controls that are reachable, side mounted oven doors, door handles, light switches, electrical outlets, etc.

At a minimum, a single-family home that includes the features described under Visitability, a zero-step entrance, doors and hallways that are wide enough for a person in a wheelchair to traverse, and a usable bathroom on the main floor, are vital first steps to creating opportunities for people with ambulatory disabilities to live independently.

I'd also like to briefly touch on the topic of community inclusion. I was born with a disability, and for most of my life have relied on a wheelchair for mobility. The Americans with Disabilities Act along with the Olmstead Decision have greatly improved Community living and community life for people with disabilities. However, when I am invited to different family members or a friend's house it is not as simple as an invite. I have to have them describe the entryways into the house, doorways and bathrooms, including having them send me detailed photos and measurements. All of this needs to be done long before my visit, just to see if I can even visit. Entryways usually have steps, so then ramps have to be made or purchased. Bathrooms are a whole other situation and typically involve a lot of work and expense to modify, so more often than not I have to limit my stay so as not to have to use the restroom. In general, my ability to participate is limited to the accessibility of their home. A home that includes these minimum Visitability features is a home that I could actually visit.

In 2015, the DD Council released a report on the value of accessibility features in single-family housing. Some key takeaways from that report tell us that homes that include basic accessibility features would be considered more valuable than those that don't. It's important to note that this conclusion was drawn from surveys of current homeowners, potential homebuyers, and realtors.

The DD Council report also surveyed developers and home builders to determine the difference between including the three basic Visitability features during new-home construction compared to retrofitting existing housing for the same features. Nearly 40 home builders and developers estimated the cost to retrofit a home with three basic Visitability features would be \$5,131 in 2015 dollars. The cost to include these features in a new build was significantly lower at \$1,370 in 2015 dollars.

We believe that passage of House Bill 405 is just one step in a larger direction towards increasing accessibility in single-family housing in Ohio. On behalf of the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council and the many individuals with developmental disabilities we support in Ohio, we encourage you to pass House Bill 405.

Thank you Chairman Roemer. I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.