

Testimony for Public Hearing on HB 2336 in Oregon House Committee on Housing
~ 2/18/21

Greetings Chair Representative Fahey, vice Chairs Reps Campos and Morgan and committee members:

My name is Connie Saldana, I reside in Ashland and am a planner with Senior and Disability Services of Rogue Valley Council of Governments (SDS RVCOG) SDS RVCOG is an Area Agency on Aging. We serve people 60 and older and adults with disabilities with programs such as Meals on Wheels and Oregon Project Independence.

The shortage of accessible housing is a perennial concern for people who have mobility impairments in Jackson and Josephine Counties.

With this in mind, RVCOG developed the Lifelong Housing Certification program, based on national and international codes, with input from professionals (several builders, a building inspector, an appraiser, a Realtor, a landlord, and several human service representatives), as well as from citizens. The program was developed in order to promote more accessible homes in the community, as well as to provide standard definitions for various levels of accessibility. To date we have certified nearly 100 certified homes in Jackson County.

Lifelong livability (“age-friendliness”) means these homes are safer and more convenient for residents of any age and ability—in other words, for everyone.

The first step in making a home livable for a lifetime is to make it accessible to guests, so they can enter, socialize and make their way safely to a bathroom if necessary. The goal of House Bill 2336 is to provide a standard definition of “visitability,” recognizable by builders around the state. The bill offers jurisdictions an added tool they can use should they want to encourage the construction of visitable homes within their boundaries.

It is worth noting that two builders in Southern Oregon who have adopted Lifelong Housing standards now build *only* certified homes. They see how desirable the open floorplan homes are and how easy they are to market to potential buyers. They have found that to make a home fully-accessible from the design stage adds only 1- 2 % to the cost of building that home. To build visitability into a home from the start would add virtually no additional cost if terrain permits a level entrance.

HB 2336 simply facilitates the application of a common-sense provision—visitability-- by defining it in the Appendices of Oregon’s Residential Building Code. I hope you find the decision to pass this bill a logical and easy one.

Thank you very much to the committee for considering this bill and, especially to Representative Marsh, who has carried this issue forward with wonderful perseverance.

Sincerely, Connie Saldana

csaldana@rvco.org

541-423-1383