

Senate Industry & Business Committee: SCR 4016

Senator Larsen and members of the Senate Industry & Business Committee,

My name is Sargianna Wutzke. I am the Lead Operations Officer for Community Options. We are an agency that provides services to people with developmental disabilities. Unfortunately, in the state of North Dakota, there is a huge concern with the lack of accessible housing for people with mobility issues. Most living spaces are not truly handicapped accessible and do not suit the needs of people with mobility difficulties, especially those individuals who utilize wheelchairs.

We serve individuals with developmental disabilities throughout the state, and this is one of the biggest concerns for those individuals receiving services. It is a struggle for them to find places to live where they can access things that we may take for granted.

When I purchased my first home, I looked at over sixty homes before I found the one that was right for me. All these homes were accessible enough for me, however there were a variety of reasons why they were not the right one. Could you imagine having only two options of places that may fit your needs due to the need for accessibility? Unfortunately, that can be the case for individuals with mobility challenges especially those who utilize wheelchairs. There are many things that we take for granted that individuals may need to make their home accessible. For a place to be accessible to someone, things in the home may need to be at a different height level for individuals to access them. These could include countertops, cabinets, light switches, electrical outlets, appliances, thermostats, shelves, and mailboxes. Some other things for homes to be accessible may include roll in showers, grab bars, and doors accessible to someone who utilizes a wheelchair.

We have individuals who live on their own in apartment buildings and would be able to complete different tasks independently if their apartment was truly accessible. We have an individual who lives in apartment but cannot do her laundry independently since her apartment building has a top loading washer making her not able to reach the knobs. We also have individuals who need staff to assist them with cooking due to where the knobs are located on their stove. These are just a few challenges that occur when spaces are not truly handicapped accessible.

Because of all these concerns, I believe a study is needed to research the availability of adequately accessible housing in the state for individuals with mobility impairments or physical disabilities. The study should also look at developing solutions to the issues with accessible housing in our state. I encourage a do pass on SCR 4016.

Sargianna Wutzke