**Supporting Affordable, Accessible Housing**

**in the Affordable Homes Act**

People with disabilities are disproportionately affected by the ongoing housing crisis in Massachusetts. The Commonwealth’s housing stock is largely old and inaccessible, and thousands of people are in nursing homes, primarily because there is nowhere accessible for them to go. The Affordable Homes Act presents a unique and important opportunity to increase the stock of affordable, accessible housing across Massachusetts and allow persons with disabilities to transition back into their chosen communities. BCIL, DPC, and Stavros are advocating for:

1. **Changes to the Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP):** AHVP is a voucher program for low-income adults with disabilities age 60 and under. The governor’s version of the Affordable Homes Act includes project-based vouchers for AHVP. We propose that the following programmatic changes also be included to align more closely with the proposed “An Act to create affordable homes for persons with disabilities” ([S.884](https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S884)/[H.1305](https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H1305)):
	1. Increasing the maximum eligibility age from 60 to 62
	2. Updated language for persons with disabilities
	3. A payment standard of 120% Small Area Fair Market Rent (SAFMR)
	4. Unspent funds remain with the program rather than revert to the general fund
2. **$60 million for the Home Modification Loan Program (HMLP):** This program provides funding to modify homes of individuals or families with disabilities or seniors so that they may maintain residency or return home from institutional settings. We support the level funding of this program, as outlined in the Governor’s version.
3. **$110 million for Community Based Housing (CBH)**: CBH funds development and redevelopment of housing for people with disabilities who are leaving or at risk of entering an institutional facility such as a nursing home. The governor’s version of the AHA allocates $55 million for this program. We propose an allocation of $110 million because of limited housing options for people wishing to transition from nursing facilities. EOHHS has cited limited housing options in its response to the ADA Olmstead lawsuit Marsters v. Healey, previously Simmons v. Baker, which alleges the state is violating the ADA and wrongly keeping people in nursing homes. Developers also support this program.
4. **Establishment of a commission for accessible housing**: This would examine new accessibility features for housing that would benefit a broader range of people with disabilities beyond those with physical disabilities, including people with autism, mental health conditions, and dementia, among others.

AHVP, HMLP and CBH are all significant programs that ensure people with disabilities have the ability to live in their own homes and communities. By increasing funding to CBH, maintaining funding for HMLP, making important program changes to AHVP, and establishing a commission to study accessibility in housing, the Affordable Homes Act will show a historic commitment to addressing the dire housing crisis for people with disabilities.

For more information please contact Brianna Zimmerman at bzimmerman@stavros.org / (413) 256-0473 Ext 121, Felix Jordan at fjordan@bostoncil.org, or R Feynman at rfeynman@dpcma.org (617) 993-6021.

Hearing Details:

* [The hearing is Thursday, January 18th, at 11 am! Click here for the Hearing Details page.](https://malegislature.gov/Events/Hearings/Detail/4819)
* You **MUST** register by **5 p.m. Monday, January 15th** in order to testify at the hearing – [you can register here](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfoxEEffpOKugrelWJi1znKNgvD34T6mE3ke55kbHQUVrJUIA/viewform). If you need help registering, contact Felix, Brianna, or R.
* The hearing is hybrid – you can testify in-person in the Gardner Room at the state house, or online via Microsoft Teams. It will also be livestreamed on the state house website.

Testifying in-person:

* **We encourage you to come to the state house to testify in person if you can**, because having lots of people in one room supporting the same bill can make a big impression on the committee. Of course, we know that’s not possible for everyone, and having a remote option makes it more accessible, so please testify virtually if that’s what works best for you!
* **We will meet at the Accessible Entrance at 10:30 and head in together a few minutes later**. The hearing is in [the Gardner Auditiorium](https://malegislature.gov/GetMap/426). The accessible entrance to the State House is located on the side of the building on Bowdoin Street across from Ashburton Place. If you're using The RIDE you should use the Capitol Coffee House at 122 Bowdoin Street as the drop-off point. This is across the street from the accessible entrance**.**
* The hearing will be long. It is scheduled for 11am to 5 pm. We will have snacks and water bottles available. Bring the things you will need to be healthy and comfortable for the wait.
* Please tell an organizer that you will be testifying in person, so that we can include you in the list of people in our group. If you have a reason related to your disability that you need to go early in the proceedings, please let an organizer know as soon as possible.

Testifying remotely:

* The virtual platform for giving testimony is Microsoft Teams. If you’ve registered, you should receive an email prior to the hearing with instructions on how to join the Teams call. You can likely join by phone if Teams itself doesn’t work for you.
* People testifying virtually will likely be called after people testifying in-person. If you have time constraints, let Felix, R or Brianna know as soon as possible, and/or reach out to the committee to ask if you can be called earlier (no guarantees that they will, though).

Preparing oral testimony:

* Each person has 3 minutes to give oral testimony.
	+ A 3-minute speech is about 400-450 words for the average speaker, but everyone speaks at different speeds, so practice out loud at home and time yourself.
	+ If you feel you have more to say than you have time for, remember you can submit a longer version as written testimony. Written testimony can be submitted up until the bill is voted out of committee – see below for instructions.
* Focus on your personal story, including the details and how it impacted you. See below for a sample template.
* If you would like help writing or practicing your testimony, or coming up with ideas for what to say in it, please reach out to Felix, R, or Brianna:
	+ R, Disability Policy Consortium: 617-993-6021 or rfeynman@dpcma.org
	+ Felix, Boston Center for Independent Living: 617-338-6665 ext. 270 or fjordan@bostoncil.org
	+ Brianna, Stavros Center for Independent Living: (413) 256-0473 ext.121 or bzimmerman@Stavros.org.

Written testimony:

* Written testimony is accepted until the committee takes action on the bill. We don’t know when that will be, but hopefully very soon, so try to submit your testimony as soon as possible!
* Write your testimony. See below for a template you can fill in. Please fill out the bracketed sections.
* Send your testimony to the Joint Committee on Housing.
	+ Use this as your subject line: **Testimony on H.4138, the Affordable Homes Act**
	+ You can put your testimony in an attached .doc or .pdf document, or in the body of the email.
		- Email your testimony to Luke O'Roark at luke.oroark@mahouse.gov and Christianna Golden at christianna.golden@masenate.gov.
		- Cc your state legislators on the email. You can find their emails by going to <https://malegislature.gov/Search/FindMyLegislator>.
		- Bcc rfeynman@dpcma.org or fjordan@bostoncil.org so we can keep track of who/how many people have submitted testimony.
* If you need someone to email your testimony to the committee on your behalf, or if you have any questions about what to write in your testimony, please reach out to R, Felix, or Brianna.
	+ R, Disability Policy Consortium: 617-993-6021 or rfeynman@dpcma.org
	+ Felix, Boston Center for Independent Living: 617-338-6665 ext. 270 or fjordan@bostoncil.org
	+ Brianna, Stavros Center for Independent Living: (413) 256-0473 Ext. 121 or bzimmerman@stavros.org.

Examples of Stories People Might Include in their Testimony:

1. “I was homeless and living in a shelter that only had stairs for over a year, which made my knee and hip problems much worse. Since I got a voucher and moved into an apartment, I’ve been able to spend more time on taking care of my health and I am in much less pain. I’ve also started watching my grandkids so my son can work, now that I have a safe place for them to play.”
2. “After I was approved for my AHVP voucher, I was so excited to start looking for a home. It took me four months to find a place that had a roll-in shower, which I need. Even then, the landlord raised the rent after a year and I had to move out.”
3. “I helped a consumer with her housing search using an AHVP voucher. We applied to over 80 apartments but none accepted her. She ran out of time on her voucher and is still in a nursing home, even though she doesn’t need or want that level of care.”

**Oral Testimony Template:**

Thank you, Chairs Arciero and Edwards, and Vice Chairs Kilcoyne and Keenan, for the opportunity to speak to you about possible improvements to H.4138, the Affordable Homes Act.

My name is [Name] and I live in [Town]. [Add a sentence or two about your disability and connection to housing. Here are some questions to think about: What is your disability? Does it impact where you can live? What kind of housing do you have or need?]

I support the changes being proposed by organizers at BCIL and DPC. I believe that the language H.1305 and S.884, “an act to create affordable homes for people with disabilities,” should be fully incorporated. I also support a doubling of funding for Community Based Housing, and the establishment of a committee exploring the range of accessibility in housing.

[Spend about a minute and a half telling your story! Here are some prompts you can use:

1. Write about a time you (or a person you care about) struggled to find an apartment that you could afford and met your access needs.
2. Write about a time when you (or a person you care about) had to stay in a nursing home or medical facility because you didn’t have an accessible home.
3. Write about a time when you were able to renovate or move into a house or apartment that met your needs and was affordable.

Whatever story you choose, answer these questions: What happened? How long did it take? What was the experience like for you? What were the consequences?]

The changes we suggest will [*if stories 1 or 2*: prevent something like this from happening to many others/*if story 3:* create more opportunities for others to have this experience]. [Add a sentence or two about why the disability community needs this bill. You can use the bill’s fact sheet to explain how this bill would improve your quality of life.]

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my experience, and the experiences of my community. I urge you to vote the Affordable Housing Act favorably out of committee, with these alterations.

**Written Testimony Template**

January 18, 2024

Joint Committee on Housing

Senator Lydia Edwards & Representative James Arciero, Chairs

**Support for and suggested improvements to H.4138, the Affordable Homes Act**

Thank you, Chairs Arciero and Edwards, and Vice Chairs Kilcoyne and Keenan, for the opportunity to write regarding H.4138, the Affordable Homes Act

Paragraph 1: Introduction

My name is [Name]. I was unable to attend the hearing on this bill on Thursday, January 18, 2024; however, I appreciate the opportunity to express my strong support of the bill and the improvements suggested by BCIL and DPC through written testimony.

[1-3 sentences about your disability and connection to housing. Here are some questions to think about: What is your disability? Does it impact where you can live? What kind of housing do you have?]

Paragraph 2: Story (you can do more than one story! Put each new story in a different paragraph)

[2-6 sentences about an experience you had. Here are some prompts you can use: Write about a time you (or a person you care about) struggled to find an apartment that you could afford and met your access needs. Write about a time when you (or a person you care about) had to stay in a nursing home or medical facility because you didn’t have an accessible home. Write about a time when you were able to move into or renovate a house or apartment that met your needs and was affordable. Whatever story you choose, answer these questions: What happened? How long did it take? What was the experience like for you?]

Paragraph 3: Connect your story to the bill

 [1-4 sentences about why the disability community needs these improvements included in the bill. Here are some of the things the improvements would do: increase the amount AHVP vouchers could pay; revise the regulations for AHVP to make them more responsive to the needs of the disability community; increase the number of people who could use Community Based Housing to transition out of institutions; explore the future of accessible housing in the commonwealth. You can also use the fact sheet to explain how this bill would improve your quality of life.]

Paragraph 4: Conclusion

[Anything else about why this bill is important to you.]

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my experience, and the experiences of my community. I urge you to vote the Affordable Housing Act favorably out of committee, with these alterations.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Optional: Contact information: phone, email, and/or mailing address]