



February 16, 2024

Representative Joe Alexander, Chair
House Special Committee on Housing

RE: HB 1168 – relative to establishing a committee to study the effects of the housing crisis on people with disabilities.

Dear Chairman Alexander and Members of the House Special Committee on Housing,

My name is Vanessa Blais, and I am the Director of Policy and Planning of the New Hampshire Council on Developmental Disabilities (DD Council). I am providing testimony on behalf of the DD Council membership, which believes this bill would have a positive impact on the developmental disability community.

At the heart of the ongoing housing crisis, there exists an untold story about the unique challenges faced by people with developmental disabilities and their unmet need for safe, stable, and affordable housing.

Having a stable home is the foundation of everything that we build our lives on. Lack of housing inevitably escalates challenges that could otherwise be met through natural supports to crisis situations that unravel everything else in our lives.

The housing crisis is a daily topic that is adversely affecting our entire state and is now putting our social and economic stability in jeopardy. As we explore solutions, the intellectual and developmentally disabled are again left out of the conversation.

It is our hope that by establishing a committee to study the effects the housing crisis has on people with disabilities, we can address this need in an effective way that puts our state's most vulnerable people at the forefront of developing solutions.

While weighing the decision to bring this legislation to a vote, legislators and the public will hear a lot of data and statistics.

While these numbers are important, we hope that our legislators also take into consideration the stories that people want to share about how the lack of suitable housing has been a barrier to living a safe, healthy, inclusive life of meaning. Something that we all deserve and something that disabled people should not have to wait longer for.

Giving the go-ahead for a legislative committee to be formed to study the effects that the housing crisis has had and continues to have on the disability community will provide an opportunity for lawmakers to hear directly from those most affected.

According to the most recent University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability (UNH IOD) Disability Compendium, 12.1% of New Hampshire residents are currently living with a disability. This means that about 1 in 8, just over 166,000, Granite Staters have a disability. It is more essential than ever to continue to support inclusion and enhance the lives of the disability community.

Our Council, by law is comprised of at least 60% people with developmental disabilities and parents or guardians of people with developmental disabilities. These members are volunteers advocating for disability justice. We thank our legislators for their service to our community and for taking our testimony into consideration.

Sincerely Yours,

Vanessa Blais, Director of Policy and Planning