



January 16, 2024

Senator James Gray, Chair
Senate Finance Committee

RE: SB518-FN – relative to incentivizing landlords to accept housing choice vouchers.

Dear Chairman Gray and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

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 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.

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.

With the cost of housing in our state exceeding record levels, and a vacancy rate that hovers below one percent, the race for voucher friendly housing becomes even more critical. This particularly affects people with disabilities who are more likely living in low-income households with less housing choices. Additionally, it is estimated that 66% of New Hampshire's housing choice vouchers are used by people with disabilities.

In my experience as a housing advocate, I have had the opportunity to speak one on one with landlords who had yet to fully understand the benefits of being a voucher friendly landlord. Many have expressed interest in an incentive program.

This legislation will not only provide incentives to landlords but will also provide training and support to the tenants who use the vouchers, increasing stability for both renter and landlord.

The state of New Hampshire is the only New England state that does not ban discrimination of voucher holders. Until this is corrected, we believe that incentive programs will increase the ability for people with disabilities and their families to acquire safe, stable, and affordable housing that better suits their needs.

Sincerely Yours,

Vanessa Blais, Director of Policy and Planning