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Chair Dexter, Vice-Chairs Helfrich and Gamba, and Members of the Committee

I submitted written testimony yesterday. I would refer you to that testimony for specific recommended edits to HB 2889. I was a member of DLCD's Rulemaking Advisory Committee and Oregon Housing Needs Work Group (for the OHNA). As mentioned in that written testimony – I was commissioned by the United Nations to write a report on the right to adequate housing back in 2015. In the course of doing the research I learned to distinguish realities from the myths or misconceptions surrounding the need for and benefits of accessible housing. Here are the facts:

First, there is significantly greater demand for accessibility or “universal design” features (not only from persons with disabilities but also from non-disabled people), than is recognized by builders, developers and urban planners.

Second, the cost of retrofitting inaccessible structures far outweighs the cost of designing and constructing with accessibility in mind.

Third, persons with disabilities, their families and friends all directly benefit from accessible design. This is not some small minority, rather a significant percent of the population. The demographic projections for Oregon are such that the population of persons with disabilities – both as a raw number and as a percent of the whole population, will increase significantly in the next twenty years.

Fourth, in Oregon there is already a dearth of accessible housing; and given the data projections from the census bureau, the state, PSU, and OHSU, the housing crisis for households with persons with disabilities, the vast majority of whom are in lower-income and lower-wealth brackets, will get dramatically worse. We will be gentrified that much more, and our right to housing equity will be denied.

Fifth, households with one or more persons with disabilities incur greater costs than households with persons with disabilities. Added costs are not only due to medical costs and assistive devices, but also related to transportation, hiring personal assistants, etc. This means even if a household's income is above the poverty line, they may still be in poverty.

Several people have noted the goal of the bill is housing choice. Without greater attention to measures that will increase the supply of accessible housing, households that include disabled persons will continue to be unfairly and arbitrarily disadvantaged. There is a solution, though. The additional cost incurred as a result of accessible design and construction is marginal, and that marginal additional cost would be further reduced once accessible features become the norm. We need to plan and build our settlements in a way that leads to housing equity for all Oregonians.

Michael Szporluk