

Submitter: Michael Eliason

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Housing and Development

Measure: SB847

Good morning committee members. My name is Michael Eliason, I'm the founder of Larch Lab, an architecture and urbanism studio and think and do tank in Seattle. I am testifying in support of the dash 4 amendment, allowing taller single stair buildings.

I had the privilege of working in Germany for part of my career. It was there that I realized that the US is an extreme outlier in the way we design our multifamily buildings with double loaded corridors – buildings planned like hotels that you see everywhere in US cities today. These buildings result in narrow units units that don't have daylight on multiple sides, they can't cross ventilate, and residents living on a loud street have no respite from the noise or air pollution. There is generally not a good mix of unit types, either. These buildings are virtually non-existent in Germany, save for the rare project for student housing or temporary workers.

Single stair building from 4- to even 10 floors and in some countries even higher, are ubiquitous almost everywhere from Tokyo to Zuerich. They are employed extensively in the EU, and are the foundational urban building in the most livable cities in the world. Single stair buildings make up roughly 60-70% of all multifamily housing in Germany and Switzerland.

The dash 4 amendment is modeled on Washington State's SB 5491 – a bill allowing single stair buildings up to 6 floors to be adopted statewide, with conditions including sprinklers, elevators, max of 4 units per floor, and fire-protected structures. Washington's bill passed 46-2 this session just last week, and was modeled on the City of Seattle's regulations on single stair buildings – where up to 6 stories are already legal, and have been for nearly 50 years.

Single stair buildings are presently legal under the OSS – but only to 3 stories. Taller Point Access Blocks will unlock more small- and medium-sized development without the need for parcel assemblage, a process which increases costs and time of development. It could also unlock better development – especially between the 'missing middle' and mid-rise scales. This means more affordable housing, more cost-effective construction, lower embodied carbon, more climate adaptive housing, more accessible housing, and more multigenerational or family-sized housing.

I fully support this amendment, thank you for the opportunity to testify.