

Dear, Chair Pham and members of the committee, my name is Franklin Ouchida and I am writing in to you today In support of SB444.

As a member of the disability community and an advocate for accessible outdoor experiences, I am writing in support of SB444 and its critical provisions that aim to enhance housing accessibility for individuals with disabilities. My personal journey has underscored the dire need for these changes, as I have faced numerous challenges in finding suitable housing that accommodates my physical needs. For many years, I lived in a housing that was advertised as "accessible." However, upon moving in, I quickly discovered that the reality was far from the promises made. The entrance to my unit had a steep ramp that was almost impossible to navigate, especially during rainy days when it became slick and hazardous. The doorways were too narrow for my wheelchair, forcing me to squeeze through or leave my mobility device outside. I often found myself isolated, unable to access communal areas where social interactions could have provided a sense of community.

These experiences are not unique to me. Many individuals with disabilities face similar barriers daily, leading to feelings of isolation and frustration. The lack of proper accessibility standards not only limits our physical mobility but also hinders our ability to live independently and engage with our communities. SB444 addresses these issues head-on by mandating that new subsidized housing developments meet specific accessibility criteria. This legislation ensures that a portion of affordable housing is designed with the needs of individuals like me in mind, promoting inclusivity and independence.

The requirement for housing to comply with the Fair Housing Act and American National Standards Institute standards is a significant step forward. These standards are not merely technical specifications; they represent a commitment to dignity and respect for people with disabilities. With SB444, we can begin to dismantle the systemic barriers that have marginalized our community for too long.

In conclusion, I urge all members of the Legislative Assembly to support SB444. This legislation is not just about building codes and compliance; it is about creating a society where everyone, regardless of their physical abilities, has the right to live in a safe, accessible, and welcoming environment. Together, we can ensure that future generations of individuals with disabilities do not have to endure the same struggles I faced but can thrive in an inclusive community. Thank you for your consideration and for taking a stand for accessibility and equality.

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