



**Submitted Testimony of the National Disability Rights Network
for the
Senate Special Committee on Aging Hearing
Entitled
Laying the Foundation: Housing Accessibility and Affordability for
Older Adults and People with Disabilities
July 20, 2023**

The National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)* thanks the Senate Special Committee on Aging for holding the hearing entitled “Laying the Foundation: Housing Accessibility and Affordability for Older Adults and People with Disabilities” on July 20, 2023. As the hearing demonstrated, the United States lacks the needed number of accessible and affordable housing units for persons with disabilities. Legislation like the Visitable Inclusive Tax Credits for Accessible Living (VITAL) Act described at the hearing would take a step forward in alleviating this problem.

As Allie Cannington from The Kelsey demonstrated in her testimony, there simply is not enough accessible housing units for persons with disabilities in this country. As a result, people with disabilities are forced into institutional settings or become homeless. This situation is expected to get worse as the percentage of Americans living with a disability continues to rise. Some statistics estimate that one in five or even one in four Americans have a disability.

Additionally, people with disabilities disproportionately live below the poverty line and consequently rely on low-income housing. As Ms. Cannington explained, this population often only has Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits which regularly are not enough to cover the rent. This fact was also highlighted by Dr. Jenny Schuetz who explained that tenants with disabilities are paying far above the recommended percentage of their fixed income on rent.

The VITAL Act is a piece of legislation that addresses the lack of affordable and accessible housing options available to individuals with disabilities. The legislation will require that states make at least 20% of their low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) units accessible. VITAL will also allocate each state housing finance authority \$150,000 to establish resource centers to support new and current nonprofit developers. Finally, the bill will create a cross-divisional housing national advisory council that will provide recommendations on national LIHTC trends.

The 20 percent LIHTC unit requirement under the VITAL Act will help to grow the number of accessible and affordable units and address the shortage of housing for people with disabilities demonstrated in the testimony. NDRN also supports the legislation's push for an advisory committee to assess and make recommendations on LIHTC trends. As stated by witnesses like Ms. Dominique Howell, there is often a trade-off between accessible and affordable housing. People who live on a limited budget often cannot afford a place that is accessible for individuals with physical disabilities. An advisory board that tracks such trends across the country can better understand and address such issues. Data collection is often one of the first steps in making change and this legislation will help to push for that. Experts like Ms. Cannington and Dr. Schuetz clearly exist and bringing together such expertise to collect and analyze data and subsequently make recommendations is essential. NDRN urges Congress to quickly consider and pass the VITAL Act to address this chronic shortage of accessible and affordable housing for people with disabilities.

NDRN appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony for this important hearing and hopes that the Senate can quickly pass needed legislation (including the VITAL Act) to address these critical issues impacting housing for people with disabilities. Please reach out to Claire Stanley, Public Policy Analyst, if you have any questions or need additional clarification on the testimony. She can be reached at Claire.stanley@ndrn.org, or 202 567-3501.

*NDRN is the non-profit membership association of Protection and Advocacy (P&A) agencies located in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and the United States Territories. In addition, there is a P&A affiliated with the Native American Consortium which includes the Hopi, Navajo, and San Juan Southern Paiute Nations in the Four Corners region of the Southwest.

P&A agencies are authorized under various federal statutes to provide legal representation and related advocacy services, and to investigate abuse and neglect of individuals with disabilities in a variety of settings. The P&A Network comprises the nation's largest provider of legally based advocacy services for persons with disabilities. NDRN and the P&A Network advocate for many people with disabilities around housing related discrimination.