

Chairwoman Maxine Waters,  
Ranking Member Shelley Moore Capito;  
House Financial Services Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity  
2129 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington DC 20910

Dear Mesdames Waters & Moore Capito:

September 29, 2010

In light of the proposed Inclusive Home Design legislation (H.R. 1408), this letter aims to provide a local testimonial regarding the Pima County local mandate for accessibility experience, builder reactions and the real estate environment.

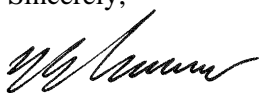
Pima County, AZ, a community of approximately one million inhabitants adopted an inclusive home design ordinance in February, 2002 to provide basic accessibility for homes built within the unincorporated areas of the jurisdiction. The main impetus for these requirements was twofold: to provide disabled persons with basic accessibility to homes when visiting neighbors, friends or family, as well as to provide homes with basic infrastructure in the event a resident experienced a disability. In fact, approximately 70 percent of people experience a temporary, if not permanent, disability at some point in their life and so providing basic housing which can accommodate these circumstances can save the community extensive expenses associated with retrofitting existing non-accessible building stock.

The Pima County Inclusive Home Design Ordinance requires basic accessibility for single family dwellings to include a zero-step entrance, an accessible route through the first floor of the dwelling incorporating clear width and approaches, adjusted heights for electrical devices, compliant door hardware, and bathroom blocking for future installation of grab bars. Since the effective date of the ordinance, over 21,000 homes have been built in the County incorporating the above features.

While these requirements were at first resisted by builders based on the fact that they would require costly changes to conventional design and construction practices, it became evident that with appropriate planning, the construction could result in no additional cost. Indeed, the jurisdiction no longer receives builder complaints regarding the ordinance and the ordinance has been so well incorporated into the building safety plan review and inspection processes that there is no additional cost to the County to enforce its requirements.

From a real estate perspective, homes built to this standard are deemed more marketable, but even more importantly; the accessible features of these homes remain unnoticed when toured by individuals not seeking accessibility. One of the initial concerns of the ordinance implementation was that it would result in homes appearing institutional in nature. This has not occurred within Pima County. As such it would seem reasonable to anticipate like benefits and impacts by extending these requirements on a national level in line with the proposed Inclusive Home Design Act.

Sincerely,



Yves Khawam, PhD  
Pima County Chief Building Official