

The State of Housing in West Virginia

Facts

- Persons with a disability are about three times as likely as those with no disability to be age 65 and over (Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey)
- 44% of West Virginia homeowners 65 and older have lived for at least 40 years in their current home (American Community Survey)
- These homes are likely at least 50 years old (American Community Survey)
- Result – old people, living in old homes.
- *Priced Out in 2014* confirms that non-elderly adults with disabilities living on SSI confront an enormous housing affordability gap across the entire nation.
- In WV, there are a reported 58,874 SSI recipients, averaging \$721 average monthly payment. To afford a 1-bedroom unit in the state, SSI recipients must use 76% of their monthly SSI income.

Issues

- **Need More Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (TBRA)** - provides payments to make up the difference between the amount a household can afford to pay for housing and the local rent standards. TBRA also can cover costs associated with housing, such as security and utility deposits. The Section 8 Voucher Program is an example of a typical TBRA program. However, funding for TBRA can also come from HOME funds for very low income individuals through Participating Jurisdictions (WVHDF in WV). PJs may design specialized TBRA programs tailored to the distinctive housing needs of the community. This includes programs designed specifically for persons with special needs. As of 2010, WV allocated \$0 to this program.
- **Compliance with State and Federal Fair Housing**
 - Reasonable Accommodations (RA) – individuals with disabilities need to know that they are entitled to RA through Fair Housing. This could include designated parking spaces, useable appliances, reachable mailboxes, accessible public spaces, and assistance animals. This requires more education for tenants and landlords, both public and private.
 - Design & Construction – the Acts require that new construction of multi-family housing of 4 units or more since March 13, 1991 **MUST** comply with seven design and construction requirements including accessible entrances

and routes of travel, useable doors, useable kitchens and baths, lower environmental controls, higher outlets and reinforced bathroom walls. These requirements are included in the current building code for WV (2015 IBC, adopted by WV Fire Commission) which is applicable to all construction of new multi-family housing in the state, public and private. However, it is only enforceable in communities with enforcement offices, and through individual complaints of discrimination against developers. The state needs more Building Code Education and Enforcement, as well as education for people with disabilities on their fair housing rights.

- Reasonable Modifications (RM) –there is a large number of multi-family housing units in WV constructed before the implementation of the Design & Construction requirements. Landlords and tenants need to know that resources are available to assist with RM including the use of Weatherization funds, assistive technology through WVATS Loan Library, and other sources dependent on individual needs.
- New AFFH – beginning with the next phase of review and development of consolidated and comprehensive plans, communities and public housing will be required to **ACTIVELY** solicit participation in the development of plans from special populations including individuals with disabilities, low-income populations, older adults, etc. Individuals need to be trained on the new requirements and strongly encouraged to participate in the public planning process so that the housing needs of individuals with disabilities are included.
- Universal Design – There is a national movement to use the concept of Universal Design (UD) for the construction of housing, communities, products, education and other interest areas. UD involves designing to meet the greatest number of needs for the greatest number of people, creating truly inclusive communities. WV is a leader in this movement, passing two previous bills to absolve volunteer housing programs (like Habitat) from liability for incorporating UD features in their building projects, and to require homebuilders to provide homebuyers with a list of UD features to consider adding for their new homes. The current bill under consideration will require homes built with state funds to use Universal Design principles to accommodate the existing and changing needs of our state residents.