



## Legislation Text

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Discussions are underway to create "Visit-ability" Legislation in Ohio to require all newly constructed homes to include, at a minimum, features such as:

- one, no-step entrance on an accessible route
- doors with 32" and hallways with 36" clear passage
- Access to a bathroom on the main floor, with a minimum clear floor space of 30"X48"
- Electrical outlets, switches and controls at heights reachable by a person using a wheelchair

The accessibility of single family dwellings, particularly those not subsidized with government monies, are **not** covered by laws such as the Fair Housing Act, Section 504 or the Americans with Disabilities Act. The intent of Visit-ability legislation is to address very basic levels of access by people with disabilities to single family homes.

Visit-ability standards in new construction will ensure that future communities and neighborhoods are truly inclusive of everyone. There are also many benefits to this design standard that go beyond the needs of "identified" persons with disabilities. In the case of a temporary accident or illness, such access can mean the difference between staying in one's home versus being hospitalized or even institutionalized in a nursing home. As the population ages in increasing numbers, accessibility will be a necessity. Addressing the issue today is practical as long term public policy.

While there is no financial impact to passing this proposed resolution, there would be small costs to homebuilders if the State Board of Building Standards adopted the recommendations outlined. Preliminary estimates indicate that including visitable features in the design and construction can cost as little as \$200. The 2008 Statistical Abstract indicates the median average square footage of a house in the Midwest is 1,824. Visitability features for a house of this size will generally cost \$0.11 per square foot.

Retrofitting an existing home with visitable features averages more than \$6,000 per home, equal to about \$3.25 per square foot. In many cases, retrofitting expenses are incurred by tax-payer funded government programs, to the tune of well over a million dollars per year.

Some of the organizations represented on the Ohio Visitability "workgroup" include the Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council, The Columbus Mayor's Commission on Disabilities, The Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, The Ohio Department Job and Family Services, The Ohio Department of Aging and The Ability Center of Greater Toledo.

To encourage changes to Ohio Revised Code that would require the Board of Building Standards to adopt rules requiring that new residential buildings be built with specific Visit-ability features.

Whereas, addressing very basic levels of access by people with disabilities and limited mobility to 1,2, and 3 family homes has been termed "Visit-ability", and;

Whereas, the accessibility of 1,2,and 3 family homes are not covered by laws such as the Fair Housing Act, Section 504 or the Americans with Disabilities Act, and;

Whereas, Visit-ability features in new construction homes will ensure that future neighborhoods are inclusive of everyone, and;

Whereas, in cases of temporary accident or illness, such access can mean the difference between staying in one's own home to recover and being hospitalized or institutionalized in a nursing home, and;

Whereas, there are little to no additional costs associated with making new construction homes meet Visit-ability standards, but substantial money may be saved in medical bills, homeowner's insurance claims, and disability claims if trips and falls are prevented, and;

Be it resolved that Columbus City Council supports and encourages changes to Ohio Revised Code that would require the Board of Building Standards to adopt rules requiring that new residential buildings be built with specific Visit-ability features including:

- At least one, zero step entrance
- Doors with a minimum width of 32 inches
- A main floor bathroom with sufficient space to allow for a wheelchair
- Reinforcement of walls or backing in the main floor bathroom for possible installation of grab bars
- Operable electrical outlets, lighting controls, electrical switches, and thermostat control to be in locations reachable by an individual in a wheelchair

Be it further resolved that Columbus City Council encourages other government bodies to support changes to Ohio Revised Code that would Require the Board of Building Standards to adopt rules requiring that new residential buildings be built with specific Visit-ability features.