

U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY



CHAIRMAN Special Committee on Aging

Chairman Bob Casey's Opening Statement

“Laying the Foundation: Housing Accessibility and Affordability for Older Adults and People with Disabilities.”

The Senate Special Committee on Aging will come to order. Good morning and welcome to the Aging committee's sixth hearing of the 118th Congress, *Laying the Foundation: Housing Accessibility and Affordability for Older Adults and People with Disabilities*. This hearing will also examine the importance of home modifications in supporting older adults and people with disabilities to remain in their homes.

We know that Stable, high-quality housing is an essential human need and the foundation of community well-being. This is especially true for the millions of Americans who wish to age in place and people with disabilities who prefer to live in their communities. A home offers, of course physical protection, and connections to community, to work to education and of course to family. But for millions of Americans, adequate housing is more of an aspiration than a reality. In particular, for too many older adults and people with disabilities cannot afford accessible housing.

Many live in unsafe housing or institutions even though they prefer to live in the communities, the communities within which they raised their families in. Accessible housing is a key feature that can assist people with disabilities and older adults to live in their own homes and chosen communities, something that research tells us over 90 percent prefer. An accessible home offers specific features or technologies such as lower kitchen counters and sinks, wider doorways, and zero-step showers.

26 percent of people in our Nation have a disability—that's about 61 million people. By 2030, one in five Americans will be over the age of 65. But less than five percent, less than five percent of the national housing supply is accessible, with less than one percent of housing stock accessible to wheelchair users.

Today, we will hear from Domonique Howell, from Philadelphia, she will share her story about experiencing homelessness after facing serious barriers to acquiring accessible housing. This of course, and I think everyone will agree with this, is unacceptable. That is why in April, I introduced legislation entitled, the VISIBLE Inclusive Tax Credit for Accessible Living, the so-called VITAL Act, Senate Bill 1377, which would add funding to the Low-Income Housing Tax

Credit Program, the Nation's primary driver of affordable housing. This program does not currently have an accessibility standard, contributing to the severe shortage of accessible and affordable housing.

That is why the VITAL act would require that a percentage of homes built with this investment meet certain accessibility standards. We need to ensure that families have a real choice when it comes to the place, that they call home. My legislation would ensure that we are increasing the amount of accessible housing available for people with disabilities and older adults to meet their needs. Investments in accessible housing are central to guaranteeing better outcomes in health and satisfaction for both older adults and people with disabilities.

Investing in accessible and affordable housing policies and programs is not only a lifesaving action for those Americans but will provide housing security for all. Whether it be for the young family who uses a stroller, the busy professional with a disability who wants to live near their work, or the recent retiree who is downsizing to age in place, all Americans, all Americans benefit from accessible housing. In recent history we have seen advancements towards more accessible housing through efforts such as the Fair Housing Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and of course the *Olmstead* Supreme Court decision.

Congress must continue to support national advancements in accessible housing and align with the needs of millions living with disabilities and our increasing aging population. So, I look forward to hearing from our witness panel about these important issues. And now I turn to Ranking Member Braun