



Journal News Submission

Are you looking for accessible housing in Westchester and Putnam Counties? Good luck. Fortunately, pending bills in the New York State Senate and Assembly may provide options to address this systemic problem. Senate bill S.4597 sponsored by Senator Krueger, and Assembly bill A.6402 sponsored by Assembly member Simon would require inclusive home design/visitability features for new residential housing that receives financial assistance for construction from the federal and state government. The bills require an accessible entrance, accessible interior doors, accessible environmental controls and, an accessible habitable space and bathroom. The term "Dwelling Unit" as described in the text of the bill shall mean a detached single family home, a ground floor unit in a townhouse, or a ground floor unit in a building of three or more dwelling units which is designed as, or intended for occupancy as a residence.

Most of the housing in Westchester and Putnam Counties was not built to serve the needs of people with disabilities, including seniors. Housing built with basic accessibility features would allow individuals to stay in their own homes should a resident become physically disabled. Naturally, most persons would prefer to age in place in their own homes rather than being forced to live in a nursing home or other institution against their will. Homes built with inclusive home design/visitability features would also enable visitor's with disabilities to gain access to their friends or families accessible homes. It is significantly more expensive for a person with a mobility disability to retro-fit their homes at the onset of a disability rather than incorporating inclusive home design/visitability standards in the home at the time of construction.

The US Census Bureau does not keep statistics on the amount of accessible homes, condominiums and cooperative apartments for State's and Counties. However a high percentage of homes in Westchester, Putnam and for the State of New York generally consist of private homes as reported in the latest Census Bureau statistics from 2009 to 2013 (47% for New York State; over 50% in Westchester and over 83% in Putnam). The vast majority of these single family homes were not built to be accessible and the remaining residential buildings generally were not constructed with disability in mind. Why should a person be forced into the sterile confines of an institution because of a physical disability away from family and friends. New York State can provide for its residents in the case of disability by enacting the inclusive home design/visitability law as soon as possible. Finally there is no financial impact to the State should these bills be signed into law. The time is now for the State to act on this much needed legislation. It is the right thing to do.

Joseph Guagliano

Legislative Advocate