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June 27, 2017

The Honorable Kevin Honan
Chair, Joint Committee on Housing
State House, Room 38
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Joseph Boncore
Chair, Joint Committee on Housing
State House, Room 112
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Supporting H.667 Promoting Visitability & Accessible Homes

Dear Chairman Honan, Chairman Boncore, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Committee on Housing,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we urge you to take favorable action on H.667, sponsored by Representative Jonathan Hecht and Senator Pat Jehlen, establishing a special commission to recommend strategies for increasing accessibility and inclusiveness in the Commonwealth's housing stock.

In addition to the significant barriers our housing stock poses for persons with disabilities, it also makes it difficult for those with limited mobility to visit friends and family in their homes. By looking into these visitability building standards, we can improve the quality of life for persons with disabilities and make Massachusetts a more inclusive state for all our residents.

Visitable homes include features such as having a one no-step entry, a doorway wide enough for a wheelchair, and an accessible bathroom on the first-floor.

Visitable homes also make a difference at transition times in our lives when we become more dependent on accessible features, sometimes temporarily, as during times of injury, or for parents of infants or toddlers. At other times, this dependency is permanent, as for returning veterans who have lost limbs; survivors of illnesses, accidents and disasters; and seniors gradually needing additional accessible features.

H.667 would begin a process of identifying the best ways to expand the number of visitable homes in the Commonwealth. Nationally, at least eight states and over 50 municipalities have adopted visitability policies that include diverse approaches in achieving these standards, such as mandatory changes in the building code, local bylaw options, voluntary incentives and public awareness.

The composition of the special commission, including stakeholders from the housing, disability, veterans, and senior communities, makes it well suited to finding the best policies that would produce visitable homes in neighborhoods across Massachusetts.

H.667 will help make our communities more inclusive and improve the quality of life for all residents. Thank you for your consideration and commitment to accessible housing.

Sincerely,



Rachel Heller
Chief Executive Officer
Citizens' Housing and Planning Association

Joseph Castellani, Jr.
Executive Director
AdLib, Inc.

Maureen Fitzgerald
Executive Director
Regional Housing Network

Bill Henning
Executive Director
Boston Center for Independent Living

Joe Kriesberg
Executive Director
Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations

David P. Stevens
Executive Director
Massachusetts Councils on Aging

Joseph Tringali
Community Services Director
Stavros Center for Independent Living

cc: Representative Jonathan Hecht
Senator Patricia Jehlen