

House Transportation, Housing & Local Government

03/19/2024 Upon Adjournment

HB24-1239 Single-Exit Stairway Multifamily Structure

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
Tanner Crawley For themselves	<p>HB-1239 is exactly the kind of forward-thinking land use that Colorado needs to embrace in order to address the growing housing affordability crisis.</p> <p>As an impact-focused affordable housing developer, single-stair buildings are well suited for affordable housing in particular as they represent a cost-effective way to build small and medium sized projects and family-oriented units on well-located urban infill lots.</p> <p>These lots are often transit oriented, walkable, near schools, or have other valuable amenities.</p> <p>There is exhaustive data that suggests this building type is safe, and I implore you to ignore any anecdotal examples that may be presented that falsely misrepresent the true safety profile of single-stair buildings. The safety of these building types has been demonstrated in numerous other countries across thousands of buildings.</p> <p>This is not the silver bullet to the housing crisis but does represent a meaningful solution that could create thousands of much needed housing units. I ask that you please support HB24-1239.</p>
Andre Baros For themselves	<p>I have been following the discussion regarding point access blocks, also known as single stair buildings, for some time now and was excited to hear that it is making progress toward legislative change.</p> <p>I have been practicing architecture for nearly 30 years, for the last 10 years in Colorado, but previously across the country and the world. I</p>

	<p>have also taught architecture, including an undergraduate studio on housing for several years at CU Denver.</p> <p>Because we don't get to build a rough draft of a building, we turn to precedent projects for lessons learned, both good and bad. This was especially true when teaching. I amassed a database of the best housing projects from around the world, best in class examples, but they had very limited value to me, my clients, or my students, because the majority would be illegal to build here.</p> <p>Examples from Europe, Asia, and South America featured family friendly, community friendly, and neighborhood scale housing which we are not allowed to emulate here. These projects were not only safe, but more livable.</p> <p>I have also worked very closely with many developers... the only people actually building housing, affordable or not... and repeatedly ran up against the irony of zoning incentives for affordable housing being impossible to implement. Many of those reasons are of course zoning related, but some reflect the fact that there is not building code option for a "slightly" larger building. The code forces you to building small or build massive.</p> <p>I look forward to the day when we don't need to travel abroad to visit sensible, beautiful, community scale housing.</p> <p>Thank you,</p>
<p>Connor Culligan For themselves</p>	<p>Hello Committee Members. I am resident in Lakewood, Colorado and I am voicing my support for HB24-1239. Colorado needs more housing options. While LIHTC, prop 123, the new Middle Income Housing Authority, and other options I am probably not aware of are filling some holes, we need as many options as possible to tackle our affordability crisis before we get to a point where we cannot recover.</p> <p>Approving and continuing this bill will allow another set of options. I lived in Cap Hill in an older apartment for several years and may have stayed in that area had there been more options. With modern fire safety, we shouldn't be afraid of this solution.</p>

	<p>Even in my single family detached neighborhood I would welcome more neighbors if these housing type became an option. There is plenty of parking, a park nearby, and Belmar is a short bike ride away.</p> <p>While local zoning will be the next hurdle, it will be up to local folks to champion these updates into local zoning.</p> <p>I believe this bill will be a tool to overcome the construction of primarily luxury single family and townhome units. Let's bring more options to the people of Colorado!</p>
<p>Derek Chavez For themselves</p>	<p>Single Stair Buildings are common outside of the US except for Seattle. There are many successful case studies in Seattle Washington who's state code is based off the IBC, and the occupants of these buildings have thrived. Enjoying the fresh air, large unit sizes and affordable rents. While the single stair building is not a silver bullet in solving the housing crisis we face in Colorado, it is a step in the right direction.</p> <p>Safety seems to be the biggest mis-nomer in these buildings mainly due to the livability being so positive. By limiting the height of the buildings, increasing fire ratings in the walls and doors and pressurizing the stair, sprinklers, plus other great mitigation strategies the safety concern is being addressed. In Colorado the bill proposes to ensure the safety of these buildings is equal to or above that of a double loaded two stair building.</p> <p>These building types should be allowed in Colorado.</p> <p>Thank you for considering these items as you investigate better livable building strategies.</p>
<p>Jesse Adkins For themselves</p>	<p>The housing needs in our State and specifically our urban areas within Colorado are significant. Costs have risen for everyone to the point that most simply cannot afford to live where they want to OR are simply unable to afford the rising costs of housing in many parts of our State. We face many challenges to house our residents yet we have not been able to provide solutions for renters or home ownership. Our cities have been significantly changed by the scale of development with large complex multi-family buildings being built. No pathway to ownership either, which has its own challenges.</p>

	<p>The single stair initiative is an excellent opportunity for new ideas to be brought forward. This building type has been successfully executed in similar municipalities to Denver and in States similar to Colorado. Life safety is of the utmost importance, yet we have the technology and ability to account for the same level of safety and security for the public to ensure the safe passage away from the building IF there were to be a life safety event. This scale of housing provides for a multitude of opportunities at a scale of development that will not dominate our neighborhoods but rather augment and integrate. The community benefits for this typology far outweigh the traditional concerns. We have the building science and construction technology to solve for those challenges. We need to lead. We need to provide solutions that are legitimate and viable. We have the ability to do this, and to ensure the safety of our residents to live comfortably within our State and communities. Please pass this Bill!</p>
<p>Amanda Spice For themselves</p>	<p>I am a Sustainability Project Manager at a local engineering firm with an architectural degree and 10 years practicing in architecture firms.</p> <p>I am writing in support of House Bill 1239 because it can strengthen our communities, support our housing market and prevent further climate risk to people and the environment as our city grows. It is a key tool our city can use to build resilient, healthy, and equitable communities and we can see the proof in other cities around our nation and the globe.</p> <p>Single-stair buildings have a wide array of inherently sustainable benefits; one being that it is a highly compact building, which means the proportion of the building envelope naturally performs better than the typical multi-family building and single family home. Because this building typology is so compact, it does not need additional exterior materials like thicker insulation to increase performance, which limits the embodied carbon impact of materials. It will be more efficient without a higher price tag to the project or to the planet.</p> <p>Single-stair buildings also have improved energy efficiency because they can utilize cross-ventilation in each unit, allowing the building to heat and cool itself naturally during shoulder seasons, reducing mechanical loads. This is unlike large spaces in single-family homes and isolated spaces in multi-family buildings. And, single-stair</p>

	<p>buildings have higher amounts of natural light, reducing lighting loads while providing a healthier space for residents.</p> <p>Single-stair buildings allow for a wide variety of unit sizes and types because they can be more responsive to a building’s site. It is common for single-stair buildings to have multiple unit types in one building, providing the range of housing options not widely available in our city to families and multiple-generation households. This is a wonderful way to foster community similar to a close-knit neighborhood - a dynamic that feels lost in many of our Denver neighborhoods. This community benefit is critical to an individual’s health, disease prevention, and social resilience.</p> <p>Single-stair buildings tie together many natural systems to create a resilient home for its residents – natural heating, cooling, and daylight in case of power outage; natural connections amongst neighbors that builds trust and a network of help in emergency situations; and diversity natural to humankind for just and fair city development leading to stronger cultural and societal bonds.</p>
<p>Robert Peebles For themselves</p>	<p>I am a local designer working in the field of architecture in Denver Colorado, and have spent my life in this field working in Multi-family housing. I have a strong desire to provide affordable and livable homes and housing options to the people within my community, which is something that has been exceedingly hard to do over the course of my career. Current development practices and Building codes incentives large buildings with small narrow units, more akin to a hotel than home for families. The bill being considered by the committee today takes a massive step towards unlocking a new building type that is not currently utilized in the United States; but is built, lived in, and loved widely in countries around the world.</p> <p>Single Stair Egress Multifamily Buildings, also known as Point Access blocks, offer so many advantages to residents here in Colorado and have been proven to be safe through their use throughout the world. Point Access Blocks, represent the possibility to provide the most homes at the lowest price point for each household. Due to the lower land acquisition and other costs compared to larger development, Point access blocks also offer greater variety in housing types than standard developments – these buildings often see bigger units that more suitable for families. Point access blocks are uniquely suited to unlock the potential of small sites to provide denser housing options that our state desperately needs. They can help develop small sites, lots that fall within the 25ft-50ft width range that are overlooked for development.</p>

	<p>I know safety will be present on your mind, and that others from our community may question the safety of this type of housing. Here in the United States these buildings have been built in Seattle in and Hawaii, using buildings codes similar in format to what we uses here in Colorado. As 6 Story Structures, these buildings are required to have life safety features that are typically used on Highrise (Buildings much taller than 6 stories) structures and improve life safety. As mentioned before, these buildings exist widely around the world – and according to published global fire safety data most countries who use point access blocks for housing have lower fire deaths per capita that we have here in the United States.</p> <p>Thank you for your time in discussing this important topic for Colorado.</p>
<p>Taylor Webb For themselves</p>	<p>As a Denver resident for the last 24 years and a licensed architect, I am writing to express my support for HB1239. Colorado is in desperate need of more housing, this bill will allow construction of significantly more units to be built in urban areas where it is most needed, as well as provide higher quality homes that can support larger families. I have studied this building type and its application throughout the world; it has proven to be safe and effective. Data shows that single-stair buildings with fire sprinklers, rated construction, and protected exits are extremely effective at protecting occupants and the structure from fire, allowing for safe egress of the occupants and access by emergency personnel. As an architect, I would not hesitate to place my seal on a single-stair design. I eagerly look forward to the time when we can build single-stair buildings throughout Colorado.</p>
<p>Alexander Martin For themselves</p>	<p>As architects, we prioritize the health, safety, and welfare of the occupants in our buildings, adhering strictly to measures that reduce risks of harm, guided by building codes. However, building codes are dynamic, evolving through a complex process and often in response to past tragedies. They may not promptly incorporate advancements in building science, leading to discrepancies in current safety standards. For instance, provisions for single-stair buildings in the code do not yet align with modern fire mitigation techniques such as fire-resistant rated materials and assemblies, sprinkler systems, emergency alarms, improved fire response equipment, and smoke evacuation methods.</p>

	<p>It's worth noting that the building code permits high-rise buildings even though the risk to human life, safety, and welfare in the event of a catastrophe is greater due to their increased height. That risk is addressed by added safety measures. Generally speaking, as risk increases so do the building code's requirements to enhance safety measures to mitigate such risk. Single-stair buildings are permitted today up to three stories. This bill as I have read it takes into account the added risk of a taller single-stair structure and incorporates modern building science to mitigate that risk responsibly. This approach is supported by the successful implementation of such buildings in cities like Seattle, Honolulu, and New York. The benefits of the single-stair mid-rise apartment include promoting decentralized and scalable multifamily housing, improving occupant access to natural light and air, encouraging the development of affordable and family-sized units, and offering communities across Colorado a viable solution to our state's housing shortage.</p> <p>I appreciate your consideration of this bill, which represents a significant step forward in our state's commitment to building safety and community well-being.</p>
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March 18, 2024

To: The Honorable Meg Froelich, Chair
Members, House Transportation, Housing and Local Government Committee

From: Lindsay Stovall
Director, State Affairs

Re: **HB 24-1239 (Single Exit Stairway Multifamily Structure)**

I am writing on behalf of the North American Modern Building Alliance (NAMBA) of the American Chemistry Council in opposition to HB 24-1239, which would allow up to 5 stories of a multifamily residential building to be served by a single exit.

NAMBA is focused on addressing fire safety through the development of robust building codes and standards for fire performance and fire safety¹. NAMBA believes that an informed public and robust codes and standards are essential to supporting a multi-layered approach to building fire safety. We also believe ensuring the appropriate level of fire safety in buildings is the joint responsibility of the entire value chain involved in building design, manufacture, construction, and regulation.

NAMBA respectfully opposes the adoption of code revisions that would permit a single means of egress in multi-family buildings and dwellings.

The simplest question to ask when considering an allowance for a single exit is, what if that single (and only) exit is blocked, too small, or otherwise compromised and unusable during a fire?

Protecting building occupants through facilitating avoidance of and escape from fire is a foundational principle of fire safety, especially fire safety in the built environment. Modifications to building and fire codes that reduce occupant egress from, and emergency responder ingress to, buildings during fire or other emergency events can result in fire safety concerns.

- Passive fire safety / protection measures such as building design requirements (e.g., building height and area limitations, fire-resistance-rated construction, fire doors, and building egress, work in concert with active fire safety / protection systems (e.g., automatic sprinkler systems and automatic alarm / notification systems) provide building occupants with the best opportunity to become aware of fires and avoid exposure to fire and smoke.
- The model building and fire code provisions, upon which many state and local building codes are based, requiring multiple egress exits and pathways are carefully developed and maintained using the best available information, research, and experience. Unfortunately, experience in this area is all too often gained from

¹ Members of NAMBA include ACC Center for the Polyurethanes Industry (CPI), ACC North American Flame Retardant Alliance (NAFRA), Atlas Roofing Corp., BASF Corporation, Covestro, DuPont, EIFS Industry Members Association (EIMA), GAF, Huntsman Building Solutions, Kingspan Insulation LLC, Metal Construction Association (MCA), Owens Corning, Polyisocyanurate Insulation Manufacturers Association (PIMA), Rmax - A Business Unit of the Sika Corporation, the Wall and Ceiling Alliance.



tragedy. Requirements for a minimum of two exits of specific minimum dimensions are one example code provisions derived from tragic lessons.

For the reasons outlined above, we ask that the committee vote “NO” on HB 24-1239. Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments. If you have additional questions, please feel free to contact me at Lindsay_Stovall@americanchemistry.com or (916) 448-2581.



March 19, 2024

Colorado General Assembly
200 E Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203

RE: Support for HB 1239 Single-Exit Stairway Multifamily Structure

We are writing to express our strong support for HB 1239, the Single-Exit Stairway Multifamily Structure bill. This bill is crucial for addressing Denver's housing crisis while maintaining local neighborhood character and promoting sustainability in local development.

HB 1239 facilitates increased density in multifamily residential buildings, addressing the demand for affordable housing in our rapidly growing city. By allowing five stories to be served by a single exit stairway, the bill encourages the development of mid-size, affordable housing options.

HB 1239 fosters urban infill on challenging lots, curbing the necessity for sprawling development on the city's outskirts. This approach preserves the character of both historic and upcoming neighborhoods while promoting environmental and social sustainability. Through maximizing the benefits of natural sunlight, minimizing transportation impacts, and fostering vibrant, resilient, and livable communities, HB 1239 paves the way for a thriving urban landscape.

In 2018, we developed an infill project in Jefferson Park, providing 26 market rate accessible condominium homes on a small footprint. The project enhanced the neighborhood in density and residential interactivity in housing that is fully embedded into the neighborhood. However, similar projects have since been hindered by cost constraints, including the requirement for multiple exit stairways and we have not been able to bring anything further like that project to our city.

Passing HB 1239 is essential for enabling developments that serve our Denver communities. Without it, we will prevent any further high caliber small scale neighborhood sensitive and market rate attainable housing being delivered for our city. I urge you to support HB 1239 for the benefit of all Denverites.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AS' followed by a stylized flourish.

Andy Schlauch
CEO
Mainspring