

My name is Kara Vander Veer. I work as the Healthcare Advocate at ARISE. ARISE is an independent living center for people with disabilities in Syracuse, New York. We help support people of all ages with any type of disabilities to live and succeed independently in the community. As the Healthcare Advocate at ARISE, I help people transfer out of nursing homes and institutions and into their own homes with the right supports so they can live independently. I also help people who are home stay in their homes by advocating for the services they need.

Often when individuals acquire a disability, they need to move into accessible housing or have their existing home made accessible. Many people can't afford to make their house accessible. The waiting list to get funding may be several years long. They also can't afford to rent an accessible apartment. Their main source of income is public assistance or social security. Public Assistance rental grants need to be increased so people are able to find affordable apartments. Those grants have not been increased in 17 years. They have no other choice and are forced into nursing homes or another institution where their freedom is taken away.

A new Housing Investment Fund should be developed. This housing fund should develop and renew communities that integrate mixed income and special needs housing. There should be no separation for Income or disability. A new Housing Investment Fund would also provide incentives for local governments to commit resources to affordable housing. Jurisdictions with limited financial resources provide public land and services to improve and support affordable housing projects. A major portion of the funding should be given to governments that work together to develop a comprehensive plan for affordable housing that show fair and equal principals.

As an Independent Living Center, we also support improving current housing programs. More funding is needed in programs such as Access to Homes will help meet affordable and accessible housing needs of people throughout the state. On a personal note, I just bought a house of my own. I was fortunate enough to qualify for funding to help me purchase my house. I also received funding to make the necessary modifications so it was fully accessible. Without these housing programs, people with disabilities, including myself, would not be able to own their own homes.

In conclusion, more accessible and affordable housing is a crucial need in New York State. It will permit everyone to have a home of their own.

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