

February 27, 2017

Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight
Chairperson Peter Kocot
State House
24 Beacon St.
Room 22
Boston, MA 02133

RE: H68 An Act to Reorganize the Department of Public Safety

Dear Chairperson Kocot:

I am writing to you and the Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight regarding H68: An Act to Reorganize the Department of Public Safety. Our issue of concern is the possible impact this reorganization will have on the authority of the state Architectural Access Board (AAB) to ensure equal access to public buildings for individuals with disabilities.

The MetroWest Center for Independent Living is a community-based organization in the Framingham area, run by individuals with disabilities. An important part of our mission is to promote access to the community for all, including individuals with disabilities. Over the past thirty or more years the AAB, the government agency charged with building codes enforcement related to access for individuals with disabilities, has worked with us to ensure that access regulations are met in both new buildings and many reconstruction projects. Through both the complaint and variance processes, the AAB works with advocates to address the many complex issues that make our community more accessible and useable by all individuals, including individuals with disabilities.

As we read the proposed reorganization plan, the impact it will have on the AAB remains unclear. Issues of concern include: the current process and size of the Board, will the Board continue to have legal standing, will the complaint process change, and will Massachusetts citizens continue to have the right to file complaints on new and remodeled construction. These important details do not seem to be addressed in H68, and should be explored or addressed by the administration before this reorganization plan is placed into action.

As a disability rights advocate, I believe that, first and foremost, the fundamental right of access is the core step in ensuring equal access in the community. Over many years, Massachusetts has been proven to be a leader in disability rights, including having a strong, independent AAB. We cannot afford to lose this gem of government - the AAB works! Please help to ensure we continue to maintain its mission, purpose and enforcement of architectural access codes of the Commonwealth.

If I can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Paul W. Spooner". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.

Paul W. Spooner
Executive Director

Cc: committee members