

FAIR HOUSING DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION REQUIREMENTS **(from the West Virginia Assistive Technology System newsletter)**

Most people know you cannot discriminate with respect to housing based upon a person's race, religion, color, sex, national origin, familial status or disability. But did you know the Fair Housing Act's disability-related provisions also set standards for how apartment buildings are built?

The Fair Housing Act has seven Design and Construction requirements for multi-family housing. These are just common sense things like a no-step entrance on an accessible route of travel, useable kitchens and bathrooms, and wider doorways and hallways. Other requirements - light switches, outlets and thermostats where you can reach them and doors that are wide enough so someone in a wheelchair can use them - are also good for anyone living in the apartment building.

One of the other requirements is reinforced walls in the bathroom. This is required because after-the-fact bathroom modifications are very expensive. If the walls of the bathroom are reinforced during construction, it is a very easy and inexpensive thing to add grab bars when needed.

The last requirement is accessible public and common use areas. This means that mailboxes, laundry rooms, rental offices, recreation areas and other places that can be used by everyone in the building are accessible to all residents including residents with disabilities. In addition, if there is a meeting or conference room open to the general public, it must also comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

These requirements are not for single-family homes. They only apply to apartment buildings built since 1991 and have four units or more. If the building has an elevator; every unit in the building must meet these requirements. If there is no elevator, only the ground floor apartments must comply.

These standards are sometimes confusing for both the people who live in the buildings and those who are responsible for designing or building them. If you have questions about the Fair Housing Act, contact the West Virginia Fair Housing Action Network at 800-834-6408