Accessible Design and Construction

What the Fair Housing Act requires of multifamily housing built after March 13, 1991.

The Fair Housing Act sets **seven basic design and construction requirements** for covered multifamily dwellings designed and built for first occupancy after **March 13, 1991**.

A building that does not meet these requirements violates fair housing law — whether or not anyone raised a concern while it was being built, and whoever owns it today.

THE SEVEN REQUIREMENTS

1. **An accessible building entrance on an accessible route**
   At least one entrance must connect to an accessible route, unless terrain or unusual site features make that impractical.

2. **Accessible public and common-use areas**
   Parking, storage, recreation areas, lobbies, mailrooms, and laundry rooms must all be accessible to residents and visitors with disabilities.

3. **Usable doors**
   Doors and passageways must be wide enough for a person using a wheelchair to pass through.

4. **An accessible route into and through the unit**
   Once inside, a resident or guest must be able to move into and through the dwelling.

5. **Accessible light switches, outlets, and controls**
   Switches, electrical outlets, thermostats, and other environmental controls must be placed where they can be reached and used.

6. **Reinforced bathroom walls for grab bars**
   Walls must be reinforced so grab bars can be added later. The grab bars themselves do not have to be installed.

7. **Kitchens and bathrooms a wheelchair user can maneuver in**
   These spaces must allow a person using a wheelchair room to turn and move.

HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES MADE EQUAL of Virginia

FAIR HOUSING & DISABILITY

WHY THIS MATTERS

Accessibility built into a building from the start costs a fraction of what it costs to add later — and it decides who can live there at all. When a building skips these requirements, people with disabilities are shut out of housing they could otherwise afford and choose.

IS THIS BUILDING COVERED?

If you are not sure, ask us.

The requirements apply to covered multifamily dwellings designed and built for first occupancy after March 13, 1991. Whether a particular building qualifies depends on when it was built and how it is laid out. We can help you work that out at no cost.

IF A BUILDING DOES NOT MEET THESE REQUIREMENTS

Tell us. HOME investigates design and construction violations across Virginia. You do not need to be certain that a violation occurred, and you do not need to live in the building. Our help is free and confidential, and we can arrange an interpreter.

MORE INFORMATION

- **Joint Statement of HUD and the Department of Justice** — the federal agencies' guidance on accessibility requirements under the Fair Housing Act.
- **FairHousingFirst.org** (fairhousingfirst.org) — technical guidance on accessible design and construction for architects, builders, and developers.
- **HOME of VA** (homeofva.org) — report a concern, request help, or ask a question.

Questions about accessible design and construction?

HOME is the only nonprofit in Virginia dedicated to fighting housing discrimination. Our services are free and confidential.

804-354-0641 · homeofva.org

This material is general information, not legal advice.