



# **People with Disabilities (PWD) and Housing**

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# About Disability Rights Texas

- We are Texas' Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Agency, part of a system established in 1977 through federal law.
- Nonprofit legal firm with the mission to protect and advocate for the rights of Texans with disabilities to ensure their equal participation in society.
- Free legal advocacy services provided to Texans of all ages with a wide variety of disabilities.
- We collaborate with a variety of federal, state and local agencies in our work.

# Services Offered by DRTx

- Provide direct legal assistance to people with disabilities whose rights are threatened or violated
- Protect rights of individuals and groups of people with disabilities through courts and justice system
- Inform policy makers about how issues impact people with disabilities
- Educate people with disabilities and family members about their rights
- Make referrals to programs and services

# Disability Population in Texas

- Per the Texas Workforce Investment Council, 12% of the TX population has a disability: over 3.5 million people.
  - Likely more than that: 15-20% of the population is neurodivergent
- Disability determination in the housing context extends beyond the head of household to the spouse, children and extended family.
- PWD are often extremely low income (ELI) because they receive government benefits, but some are also employed in low-wage jobs.
  - Workforce housing encompasses people with disabilities

# Barriers to Equitable Housing for PWD

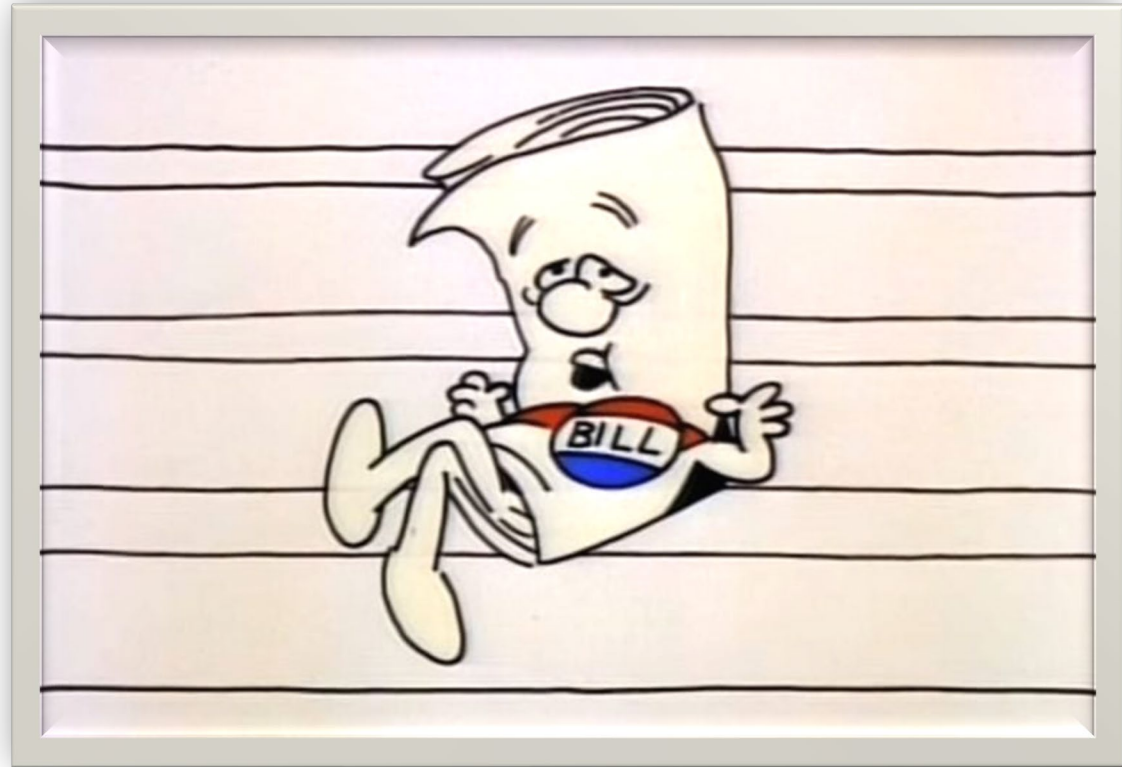
- Lack of accessible housing units
  - *Very few accessible and affordable units in TX*
- Lack of deeply-affordable housing units – 30% AMI and below
- Stigma
  - Belief that people with disabilities are incapable of being good tenants
    - Common for people with invisible disabilities: can't see it, it's not there
    - Common for people experiencing mental illness
  - Belief that low income households will be bad tenants
- Lack of landlord/service provider education
  - People do not know what to do when a person is decompensating

# DRTx Housing Services

- Address housing discrimination by governments, HOA's, housing providers, and others against persons with disabilities in Texas via:
  - litigation, negotiations, informal and formal advocacy, policy change, and other creative means.
- We help people request accommodations so they can enjoy their homes as would a person without a disability (**equitable housing**):
  - Terminate a lease early (DRTx online letter generator)
  - Have a support animal
  - Payment plan (DRTx online letter generator)

# DRTx Housing Issue Areas for the 89<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session

- Deeply Affordable Housing
- Tenant Success
- Disaster Planning



# Deeply Affordable Housing

- The LIHTC program plays an outsized role in meeting the needs of PWD
  - One of the only creators of affordable AND accessible housing
- Serving PWD in this program requires understanding their nuanced needs, including level of affordability, location and amenities.
  - Accessible transportation + routes
  - Quality of SPED services is related to a school's capacity to provide them
- We aim to improve housing affordability through continued involvement and advocacy in the QAP process



# Tenant Success

- There is a serious lack of available units that take vouchers – as a result, people finally get vouchers and end up surrendering them
- Texas Tenant Readiness and Landlord Incentive Program (TRLI) – HB 1917 by Walle (88R)
  - 4-year pilot program, \$4 million total request of legislature
  - TDHCA contracts with nonprofits to identify voucher-holders in need of housing assistance
  - \$3,500 to households to remove housing barriers including deposits, incentives, furniture, utility bills.
  - Will be re-filed by Rep. Walle, and filed by Sen. Eckhardt in the 89<sup>th</sup>

# Tenant Success Cont'd

- Supportive Housing Rental Assistance Program (SHR)
  - Provides housing assistance funds to Local Mental Health Authorities (LMHA) to do whatever is needed to keep their clients stably housed.
- LMHAs across the state are using their money and want more.
- Funding has been flat since the program was created, disregarding market volatility, COVID impacts, and the program's success rates.
- Senate Rider #128 (88R)
  - \$12 million in GR split over biennium
  - Double the GR investment of prior biennia

# Inclusive Disaster Planning

- PWD are at an increased risk of experiencing negative outcomes during disasters than people without disabilities
  - Increase in food instability and lower likelihood of returning home after an evacuation
- Disaster planning is fractured across many agencies and parts of statute – but, it is largely local.
- HB 2858 (88R) by Rep. Morales Shaw
  - Ensures localities consider persons with disabilities when creating local disaster plans
  - Will be re-filed by Rep. Morales Shaw and filed by Sen. Zaffirini in the 89<sup>th</sup>

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