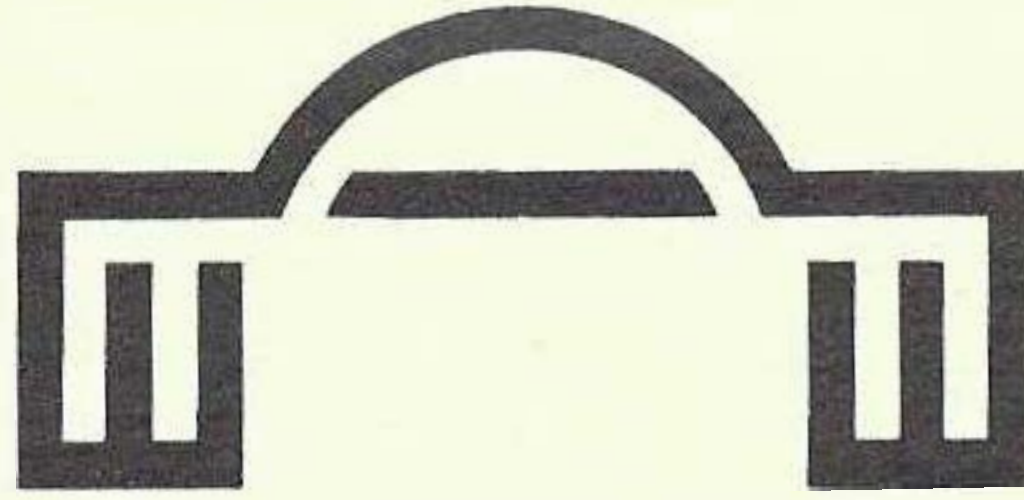




NORTH CAROLINA CENTER FOR
PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH INC.

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RESEARCH GROUP SAYS NORTH CAROLINA BEHIND IN BARRIER FREE DESIGN FOR HANDICAPPED

Once the national leader in the field of barrier free design for handicapped citizens, North Carolina is now behind other states in architectural accessibility, says the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research. The Center, an independent non-profit research group, says the accessibility section of the state's building code was the best in the nation in 1973 but that 20 other states have now surpassed us.

In an article in the Center's magazine, N.C. Insight, Raleigh architect Ronald L. Mace argues that North Carolina should make buildings more accessible to disabled persons in the state by updating its state building code. The Handicapped Section of the Building Code remains one of the better codes in the country in its policy and scope of applications, says Mace but adopting a new code to conform with federal standards would both save the building industry money and ensure more accessible housing and workplaces for handicapped citizens. Of the 20 states with better building code provisions cited in the article, five are in the South --Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Virginia, and South Carolina.

The Handicapped Section of the North Carolina Building Code originated when Governor Robert Scott's Study Committee on Architectural Barriers found that the state's requirements for barrier free design were being ignored by the building industry. After a year of negotiation and compromise between the building industry and advocacy groups for handicapped persons during Governor James E. Holshouser's administration, the state Building Code Council adopted new mandatory building requirements in 1973. At the time, the state's accessibility code became a model for the nation by requiring that barrier free design be implemented in all new and extensively remodeled buildings. The 1973 handicapped section was singled out as the best in the nation by federal General Services Administration official Walter Meisen in testimony before Congress in 1975.

However, during the last decade, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), the recognized national authority in setting architectural standards, reviewed its 1961 technical specifications for barrier free design and released a new model in 1980. At the same time, a change in federal law required the U.S. Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board to develop uniform guidelines which all federal agencies must follow in building design. The ANSI initiative, coupled with the revised federal standards, created a new uniformity at the federal level.

Now, all federal agencies will, for the first time ever, use the same technical specifications for such things as toilet stalls, ramps, and water fountains. More importantly, says the Center, 20 states quickly adopted these new accessibility

requirements, but North Carolina has not. "Designers, builders, manufacturers, owners, and taxpayers in those 20 states will benefit from increased efficiency and cost savings by not having to custom design equipment in baths, kitchens, and elevators, for example," states Mace. At the same time, he says disabled people would have better access to quality housing when buildings become more barrier free.

Mace's article recommends that the N.C. Building Code Council "amend the technical specifications of the [state's] handicapped code to conform to the 1980 ANSI [American National Standards Institute] Standard and the new Uniform Federal Standard." Mace, who is disabled, is one of 12 gubernatorial appointees to the N.C. Building Code Council. He also recommends that this Council require five percent of every type of unit (one-bedroom, two-bedroom, etc.) in apartment complexes across the state to be accessible to handicapped persons.

This recommendation is more controversial because presently builders generally construct only one-bedroom apartments that are accessible. Mace says this practice limits the types of families that can use the apartments. Under a state statute enacted in 1974, builders can receive a \$550 state tax credit for each unit they build which complies with the handicapped section of the building code.

Mace praises the Special Office of the Handicapped in the N.C. Department of Insurance and says it should receive continued support. The office should make efforts, he says, to publish a booklet identifying apartment complexes throughout the state where accessible units exist, as well as a booklet listing architectural products which meet state requirements for accessibility.

For more information, call Bill Finger, editor of N.C. Insight, at (919) 832-2839 or Mace at Barrier Free Environment, Inc. (919) 782-7823.

This article is part of a special 96-page issue of N.C. Insight focusing on state policies affecting handicapped citizens. The magazine is available for \$4.00 from the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research, P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27602.