



February 27, 2023

The Honorable Assemblymember Lee
California State Assembly
California State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Support – [AB 835](#) – State Fire Marshal: building standards: single-exit, single stairway multiunit residential buildings.

Dear Assemblymember Lee,

We write on behalf of Abundant Housing LA in support of Assembly Bill 835, which would direct the State Fire Marshal to research, develop and propose to the California Building Standards Commission for its consideration standards for single-exit, single stairway multiunit residential buildings (R-2 occupancies) above three stories.

Abundant Housing LA is a pro-housing, nonprofit advocacy organization working to help solve Southern California's housing crisis. We support reforms to legalize more homes, make homes easier to build, increase funding for affordable housing, and protect tenants, which are all needed to make housing more affordable, improve access to jobs and transit, promote greater environmental sustainability, and advance racial and economic equity. As a community organization, in order to maintain our independence, we do not accept financial support from housing developers or their consultants.

Currently the California Building Code requires apartment buildings over three stories in height to have two exit stairways. While intended to promote safety and facilitate emergency egress, the sponsors of AB 835 have conducted [research](#) indicating that some other countries allow single-stair buildings, above three stories in height, in conjunction with other building safety measures, and have better fire safety outcomes than the United States. Dual-stair buildings reduce flexibility in building design and make it harder to build housing, and particularly family-sized apartments, on narrow lots. The need to assemble land into a large building site increases costs and makes it more difficult for small home building firms to participate in the market.

AB 835 takes a thoughtful approach to this issue by directing the State Fire Marshall to propose single-stair egress standards to the California Building Standards Commission. The Commission would remain free to use its professional judgment to evaluate the proposed standards and would not incorporate them into the Building Code unless it determines that such changes would be consistent with public safety. This aspect of the bill is critical because California faces a multitude of natural hazards that can affect buildings, from seismic to fire to flooding, and the

Building Code should not be politicized. However, it is reasonable to have the Commission consider amendments to the Building Code based on international best practices.

California faces a dire housing affordability crisis. Making infill housing development easier on small lots through egress reform is worth serious consideration. AB 835 would start that process without overriding the judgment of the professional engineers who develop the Building Code.

For these reasons, we are proud to support AB 835, and we offer our thanks to you for bringing this important bill forward.

Sincerely,

Leonora Camner

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