

**Testimony of the International Code Council
to the
Committee on Veterans Affairs
Subcommittee on Health**

H.R. 2065, the Safe Housing for Homeless Veterans Act

**Robert Drexler, Member of the Board of Directors of the International Code Council, and
Fire Marshal, Greece, New York
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Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Robert Drexler, Member of the Board of Directors of the International Code Council. I also serve as Fire Marshal for the town of Greece, New York. I am pleased to be here to discuss the importance of compliance with building and fire codes, speaking on behalf of the over fifty thousand building, fire code officials and other professionals across the United States who are the members of the Code Council.

The Code Council was formed in 1994 as a nonprofit organization dedicated to developing a single set of comprehensive and coordinated national model construction codes. The founders of the ICC were the Building Officials and Code Administrators International, Inc. (BOCA), International Conference of Building Officials (ICBO), and Southern Building Code Congress International, Inc. (SBCCI). Since the early 1900s, these nonprofit organizations developed three separate sets of regional model codes used throughout the United States. We joined these three groups together, and published a single code for the United States- the *International Codes*- beginning in 2000. In 2003, the International Code Council became the successor organization to the three legacy code groups, and so we are celebrating our tenth anniversary as an organization in 2013.

Today our International Model Codes have been adopted at the state or local level in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Numerous federal agencies, including the General Services Administration, the Department of Defense and the Architect of the Capitol have implemented the I-Codes, as have Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Code Council's 50,000 members and over 300 chapters include state, county and municipal code enforcement and fire officials, architects, engineers, builders, contractors, elected officials, manufacturers and other construction industry professionals.

I come before you today to encourage support for HR 2065, the Safe Housing for Homeless Veterans Act, sponsored by Rep. David McKinley of West Virginia and Rep. Grace Napolitano of California. Those of us who work in the realm of building safety at both the state and local level appreciate the concern that this bill has for the welfare of our veterans, who are living in housing subsidized by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In the building sector, the International Residential Code, the International Building Code, and the International Fire Code establish the basic requirements for building safety at the time of construction, and in the case of the Fire Code, at the time of the annual inspection. These codes

do not guarantee that a building will be safe from any and all hazards, as destructive forces can bring down any building if enough force is applied. But the codes do assure that when faced with the typical hazards that buildings are expected to encounter, including fire, windstorm, flooding, and even normal or even somewhat careless daily use, the building will allow for building residents and users to survive, and for first responders to safely rescue building occupants, and minimize property damage.

In most jurisdictions around the country, either at the state level, or at the local jurisdictional level, both the International Building Code (IBC) and the International Fire Code (IFC) assure that buildings used for residential care and housing are safe. Our local code officials around the country inspect veterans' homes and assure that they meet currently adopted codes, just as they do other commercial buildings. This is true in California, as well as 42 other states that have adopted both the IBC and the IFC. In fact all 50 states have adopted the IBC at either the state or local level, and 43 states adopt the IFC, while a significant number also adopt the Life Safety Code(LSC), at either the state or local level.

HR 2065 wisely does not attempt to mandate one code or the other for compliance by facilities approved by the Department of Veterans Affairs for reimbursement, but requires a certification from all homes that they meet either the IBC and IFC, or the LSC, which are functionally, and from a safety standpoint, equivalent code requirements.

In addition, the bill does not impose any onerous administrative burden on the Department of Veterans Affairs, other than to assure that each facility receiving reimbursement has filed a certification, either from the local code official, or from a competent third party, that code requirements are met. This is a reasonable and very workable requirement that mirrors similar requirements in place for other medical facilities that must provide very similar assurances to the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare (CMS), in the Department of Health and Human Services.

It is true that for veterans' homes covered by this requirement that are located in a jurisdiction that does not adopt and enforce either the IFC or LSC, there will be a small additional burden of obtaining an annual inspection to show compliance with the relevant code provisions. However, it is the clear intent of the bill sponsors, and a worthy goal in our opinion, that the safety of our veterans, who sacrificed so much for our freedoms, should be provided with safe housing, especially when the taxpayer is subsidizing that housing. It's hard to argue that our veterans should not be assured of minimal safety in their housing, when the cost of assuring safety is a few hundred dollars or less.

In closing, the International Code Council is proud of our work in developing the model codes used by most jurisdictions to assure a basic level of safety in the built environment, and we applaud your efforts to use those codes to protect the safety of our veterans. We continue to work to update and improve the codes, issuing revised codes every three years, through our governmental consensus process for the regulation of building construction. I applaud the work of your Subcommittee and encourage continued collaboration between the public and private sectors to achieve the important goal of increased safety in our nation's buildings. Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I will gladly answer any questions.