

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 2835
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Local Government
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Single stair buildings are small scale apartments that are built with a small number of apartments per floor, all served by a single stairwell. This building typology is used widely across the globe, but in the United States they have a limited presence due to restrictions imposed by the International Building Code (IBC)—a model design and building code that is used almost exclusively in the U.S. The IBC dictates that for apartments over three stories tall, each unit is required to have access to two stairwells.

To meet the multi-staircase requirement, large apartment complexes are built using double-loaded corridors with apartment units on both sides of a windowless hallway. To offset the loss in rentable space that is taken up by the second stairwell, double-loaded corridor buildings must be large. The single-stair prohibition means that multi-family apartments are only economically feasible at great density.

Conversely, single-stair buildings are smaller and fit on lots that could not accommodate large complexes. They can achieve 95 percent floor plate efficiency and exist more cohesively within existing neighborhoods. They have better cross-ventilation and energy-efficiency and, with access to more lights on multiple side of a unit, can accommodate units with more bedrooms and better accommodate families.

S.B. 2385 would allow cities to adopt standards outside of the IBC to build single stair apartments, clawing back authority to allow for the housing market to respond to the varied needs of Texas families.

Supporters include: Texans for Reasonable Solutions, Habitat for Humanity (Dallas; Austin), Dallas Housing Coalition, AURA, Texans for Housing, and Institute for Justice.

As proposed, S.B. 2835 amends current law relating to regulation of stairway requirements in certain multifamily residential buildings by political subdivisions.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Chapter 214, Local Government Code, adding Subchapter I, as follows:

SUBCHAPTER I. SINGLE STAIRWAY IN CERTAIN APARTMENT BUILDINGS.

(a) Authorizes a municipality to allow apartment buildings to be served by a single stairway regardless of the municipality's adoption of the International Building Code.

(b) Requires a municipality that chooses to allow apartment buildings to be served by a single stairway to do so under the following conditions:

(1) has no more than six stories above grade plane and does not qualify as a high-rise, as defined in the International Building Code, as adopted

under Section 214.216 (International Building Code), Local Government Code;

(2) has no more than four dwelling units on any floor;

(3) regardless of the stairway construction type, has automatic sprinkler locations in interior exit stairways that comply with the requirements of NFPA 13 for combustible stairways;

(4) has an exterior stairway or interior exit stairway is provided and doors in the stairway swing into the interior exit stairway regardless of the occupant load served, provided that doors from the interior exit stairway to the building exterior are permitted to swing in the direction of exit travel;

(5) has openings to the interior exit stairway enclosure are limited to those required for exit access into the enclosure from normally occupied spaces, those required for egress from the enclosure, and openings to the exterior. Requires that elevators not open into the interior exit stairway enclosure;

(6) has interior exit stairway enclosures have a fire-resistance rating of not less than two hours;

(7) has a minimum one hour fire-resistance rated corridor separates each dwelling unit entry/exit door from the door to an interior exit stairway, including any related exit passageway, on each floor;

(8) has dwelling unit doors that do not open directly into an interior exit stairway;

(9) has no more than 20 feet (6096 mm) of travel distance exist between the exit stairway from the entry/exit door of any dwelling unit;

(10) has exit access travel that does not exceed 125 feet (38100 mm);

(11) has an exit serving the Group R occupancy that does not discharge through any other occupancy, including an accessory parking garage;

(12) has an exit that does not terminate in an egress court where the court depth exceeds the court width unless it is possible to exit in either direction to the public way;

(13) has no openings within 10 feet (3048 mm) of unprotected openings into the stairway other than required exit doors having a one-hour fire-resistance rating;

(14) has emergency escape and rescue openings compliant with International Building Code Section 1031 on all floors served by the single exit;

(15) has no electrical receptacles in an interior exit stairway;

(16) has met all other applicable provisions of the adopted local building codes, and;

(17) has an automatic smoke and fire detection system that activates the occupant notification system in accordance with IBC Section 907.5 installed in the building in certain areas.

Section 211.054. SMOKE AND FIRE DETECTION SYSTEM REQUIRED in SINGLE STAIRWAY BUILDINGS. Requires that an automatic smoke and fire detection system that activates the occupant notification system in accordance with IBC Section 907.5 be installed in single stairway apartment buildings in common spaces outside of dwelling units; laundry rooms, mechanical equipment rooms and storage rooms; all interior corridors serving dwelling units; and all main floor landings of interior and exterior exit stairways.

SECTION 2. Effective date: September 1, 2025.