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October 6, 2023

National Architectural Accrediting Board
Tanya Tamarkin, Executive Director
NAAB Board Members
107 S. West Street, Ste. 107
Alexandria, VA 22314

Subject: The Accessible Design Accreditation Initiative (ADAI)

Dear Director Tamarkin and distinguished NAAB Board members,

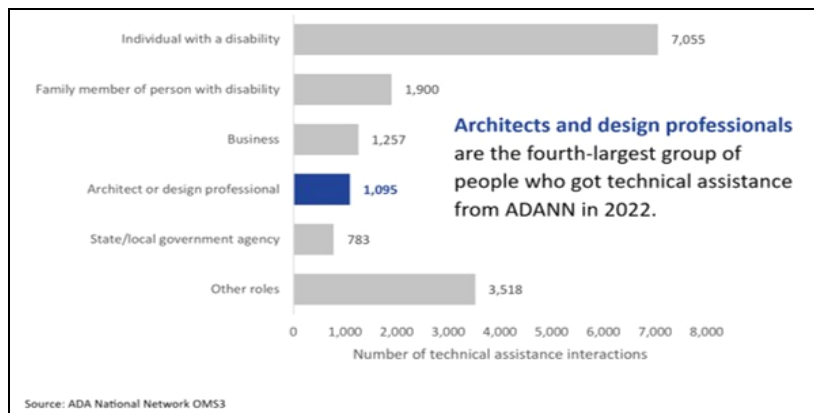
Thank you for this opportunity to discuss advancing the accessible design standards. The people and agencies presenting this letter are advocating for enhanced educational objectives that emphasize accessible design for schools in the NAAB accreditation program. We propose and strongly urge NAAB to integrate new academic objectives based on the foundational principles of the *2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design*, the applicable *International Code Council* model codes, and the *ICC/ANSI A117.1 Standard for Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities*.

The sponsors of this initiative are at the forefront of accessible design in education, research, regulations, code development, and advocacy. We work and teach with architects, designers, code officials, and persons with disabilities, and the agencies that serve them. We collectively believe that the education of future architects must be enriched with a more rigorous application and deeper understanding of accessible design. The Accessible Design Accreditation Initiative (ADAI) we are recommending matches your Vision statement that *“NAAB advances educational quality assurance standards and processes that anticipate the needs of academic programs, the profession, and society, to promote a better built environment.”* We have developed and are proposing the ADAI to NAAB, NCARB, ACSA and CIDA with those same goals.

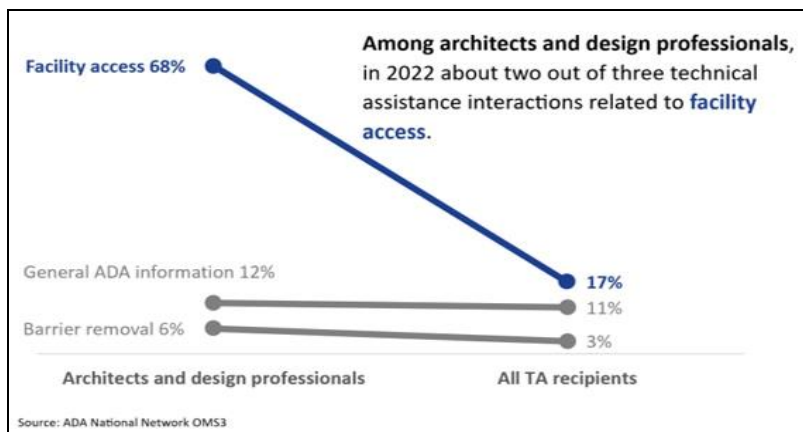
BACKGROUND: Our Region VII Great Plains ADA Center is one of ten *ADA Centers* nationwide, all of which have been grant-funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) for 33 years. Together, we form the ADA National Network (ADANN) with a focus on accessibility through education, research, technical assistance, and more across all 50 states. Our grant objectives focus on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and include accessible design, health care, employment, education, law enforcement, and more. We work in close partnership with the International Code Council (ICC), the U.S. Access Board, the American Institute of Architects (AIA), the US Department of Justice (DOJ), the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, (HUD), universities, and other well-known organizations, including the many co-signers herein.

RESEARCH: Our ten ADA centers report to DHHS by tracking our technical assistance and other services among twenty-one categories of people and professions with whom we interact. In reviewing our data, we found trends that support what we and the other sponsors of this letter recognize as a shortcoming in the knowledge base of many professional architects. The following graphs summarize the most relevant patterns.

In 2022, almost 1,100 design professionals requested technical assistance on accessible design applications for real-world projects. The aggregate data for all ten ADA Centers places ‘Architects and design professionals’ in the fourth position out of those twenty-one contact roles nationwide. Tellingly, the only three categories that surpass architects in their need to understand accessibility requirements are: ‘Persons with Disabilities’, their ‘Family Members’ and, ‘Businesses.’



The educational opportunities we perceive within the architectural community become clear in the next graph, which coalesces 28 separate applications of the ADA. ‘Facility Access’ consistently ranks as the number one category of technical assistance that our ten ADA Centers interpret, outpacing the next highest category by a factor of nearly two.



The first three quarters of 2023 display nearly identical statistics. We understand that data from a short span of ADANN reporting may seem insignificant. Extrapolating this pattern across 33 years, we conservatively estimate more than 40,000 ADANN interactions with design professionals. And we are not alone. The majority of the sponsors who support this initiative also teach and deliver design guidance and consulting services. There is no quantitative method that can accurately capture our shared conviction that the current measures for educating aspiring architects need advancement.

SOLUTIONS: Standardizing accessible design accreditation objectives *before* students enter the profession is pivotal. The current voluntary and disjointed patchwork of certification programs, conferences, symposiums, webinars, and similar educational venues for architects serves an important niche and irreplaceable service in advancing knowledge, licensure retention, etc. I am sure you can agree that the substance of these courses and events is not a substitute for accredited academic programs that apply didactic methodologies not generally replicated in periodic venues. I.E.: Consistent attendance; competency in application; research collection and analysis, peer-reviewed publication; examination psychometrics; performance-based assessments; studios and other modalities used every day in colleges and universities.

Along with this letter, we are also presenting ‘*The Accessible Design Accreditation Initiative Best Practices Guide: Educational Foundations Of Accessible Design*’ (ADAI BPG) for your consideration as the next step in the evolution of educational standards. The methods in the ‘ADAI BPG’ encompass the technical, human, practical, and legal foundations of accessibility, reflecting the environment in which persons with disabilities function every day. In our combined experience, successful architectural careers demand a profound understanding of the human scale of accessibility and the technical expectations of firms and clients regarding the regulatory systems governing all accessible design and construction in the U.S. today. Only at that level can we ensure professional effectiveness and subsequent equity in designing for everyone. We believe the ADAI BPG offers an effective framework-in-progress toward those goals.

We offer our support and welcome the prospect of collaborating and advancing the NAAB Mission that “...*develops and maintains an accreditation system in professional degree education that enhances the value, relevance, and effectiveness of the profession of architecture.*” The potential benefits to persons with disabilities, students, professionals, schools, and society at large are unmistakable.

With sincere thanks, we look forward to your reply.

Troy Balthazor, Executive Director

Richard Sternadori, Senior Program Coordinator

Enclosures:

‘The Accessible Design Accreditation Initiative Best Practices Guide: Educational Foundations Of Accessible Design’

United Spinal letter, Vincenzo Piscopo, President/CEO

United States Access Board letter, Sachin Dev Pavithran, Ph.D., Executive Director

Signatories
The Accessible Design Accreditation Initiative

Accessibility Professionals Association (APA)

John Torkelson, President
www.accessibilityprofessionals.org

**Accessibility Professionals Association Certification Program (APAC)
Code Consultants Inc.**

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American Society of Interior Designers (ASID)

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Association of Licensed Architects (ALA)

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Southeast ADA Center**

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Certified Access Specialist Institute - CASI

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International Code Council

ICC/ANSI A117 Committee

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Dr. Ann Deschamps, Director
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New England ADA Center

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Northeast ADA Center

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Texas Architect Magazine
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