



July 17, 2023

Honorable Mayor Watson
Honorable City Council Members

Re: AIA Austin Proposed Building Code Amendment to Address Windowless Bedrooms

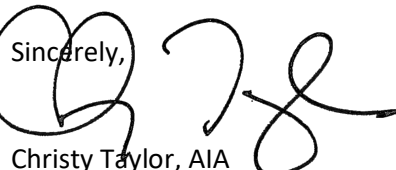
Dear Mayor and City Council Members,

As licensed Architects, we are entrusted by the State of Texas with protecting the health, safety, and welfare of all building occupants. This responsibility includes promoting the physical, emotional, and social well-being of building occupants by enabling equitable access to all building features. This is important to note when much of Austin's attention is directed at finding ways to increase our housing supply. Unfortunately, very little consideration is focused on ensuring that the housing being provided is of a high quality and supportive of equitable user experience.

Unfortunately, Austin's current building code, the 2021 International Building Code (IBC), allows for unequitable design, in that it allows bedrooms in dwelling units to be built without windows. This results in bedrooms without any access to natural daylight. Architect and AIA Austin Member Juan Miro, FAIA, has been documenting examples of bedrooms without windows for several years now and has highlighted a growing number of bedrooms being built in Austin without access to natural light. As Mr. Miro's research documents, there is plenty of evidence indicating that reduced access to daylight can cause building occupants to develop several physical and mental issues, including depression, anxiety, stress, and sleep disorder.

Several other cities around the United States have already addressed this issue and have amended their building codes to remove this loophole. New York, San Francisco, and Chicago now all require natural light to be provided in bedrooms. While we can learn a lot from these cities, it is also important that we balance any possible impacts that building code amendments could have on affordability. That said, after a lengthy examination, AIA Austin has crafted proposed IBC amendment language to address this natural light issue while also minimizing impacts on construction costs and affordability. The proposed language is meant to apply to new buildings and provide enough flexibility to encourage creative design solutions and a diversity in dwelling unit types, while avoiding unintended consequences on affordability.

AIA Austin believes this proposed building code amendment aligns with the City's adopted housing priorities and we strongly encourage your support for higher quality housing for all Austinites by instructing the Interim City Manager to make this amendment immediately and not wait until the next possible building code adoption cycle in 2024. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or would like more information.

Sincerely,

Christy Taylor, AIA
AIA Austin President 2023