

May 17th, 2023

The Honorable Representative Marvin L. Abney
Chair of the House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: SUPPORT for H6168

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Committee on Finance,

My name is Shana Crandell and I am a resident of Pawtucket. I am a community organizer and a part-time teacher at RIC. I am writing to you today to express my strong and enthusiastic support for H6168. Rhode Island has an opportunity to make history by instituting the first-ever statewide public developer of housing. I urge you in the strongest possible terms to pass H6168 and finally solve a housing crisis that is quite literally killing us.

For the last year, I have been organizing some of our state's poorest and most vulnerable tenants. Their slumlord Pioneer Investments rents hundreds of units across Rhode Island, and I have visited a majority of them. I have seen families with young children go through the whole winter with their kitchen stove as the only source of heat. I have known a family whose pet chinchilla was eaten by rats the size of possums. A tenant who has become a friend as well as a leader of our campaign has twins with significant developmental delays caused by lead poisoning. Like most Pioneer buildings, theirs did not have a lead certificate as required by RI law. Meanwhile, every single Pioneer apartment—and I do mean without exception—fails to meet our state's minimum housing standards. (This has been documented in numerous articles in the *Providence Journal* and *UpriseRI*.) This is the reality for so many people in our state, and our leaders should be ashamed that we have let it happen.

The private rental market will never solve the housing crisis. It cannot, because its aim is profit and not the wellbeing of people. It will always be profitable to cycle vulnerable people with no other options through substandard housing, running them through the eviction machine when they inevitably fall behind on the ever-increasing rent. To solve the housing crisis, the state must build housing directly. Solving the housing crisis is both a moral and a practical imperative. The dignity of people is at stake, making it a moral imperative. And housing instability ripples through people's lives, ultimately

costing us far more than it would to do the moral thing and guarantee every Rhode Islander stable, healthy, and truly affordable housing.

Historically, public housing has segregated the poor and ultimately become disinvested when federal subsidy runs out. The revolving fund created by H6168 would create mixed-income public housing that would sustain itself through cross-subsidy. In order to be deeply affordable and therefore accessible to the poorest Rhode Islanders, the public developer should receive additional subsidy through taxes on the rich as well as on harmful and unnecessary activities like real estate speculation. If you value the dignity of human beings, then you ought to believe that housing is a human right. I urge you to make this right a reality by passing H6168 today.

The public developer of housing not only realizes the human right to housing, it also creates recession-proof construction employment. Public money must pay strong living wages, and builders must be paid full Davis Bacon rates. Finally, public construction must meet Act on Climate standards, giving the public developer significant environmental value. Substantial housing-related emissions will be reduced thanks to H6168, helping Rhode Island meet its ambitious and necessary climate goals.

Thank you for your consideration. Do the right thing and make history today!

Sincerely,

Shana Crandell