

The Village Common of Rhode Island

Aging Better Together

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

The Honorable Marvin Abney, Chair

Testimony by H. Philip West Jr on February 29, 2024,
in support of *increasing* Housing Opportunity Bond to \$150 Million
in Article 5, Question 3, of 24-H 7225 by Rep. Rep. Marvin Abney

Thank you, Chairman Abney and members of the House Committee on Finance for your crucial work in amending the Budget proposed by Governor McKee. **The Village Common of Rhode Island hereby urges you to *increase* the proposed Housing and Community Opportunity Bond in Budget Article 5, Question 3, to \$150 million.**

My name is H. Philip West, Jr. I serve as a volunteer lobbyist on behalf of The Village Common of Rhode Island, a statewide non-profit that deploys a wide array of volunteer supports to help older adults live safely and independently in homes they love. We currently serve six locally organized and operated villages — in Barrington, Burrillville, Cranston, Glocester, Providence/Pawtucket, and Westerly — and we're organizing in several additional local communities. Two groups that expand our local village model are also organizing: (1) A Spanish-speaking Southside Providence Village caregiver support group whose participants have roots in the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Venezuela, Columbia, and Argentina, and (2) A non-geographical Pride Circle of aging LGBTQ+ members and their allies. Our proven success in mobilizing volunteers reduces costs, strengthens communities, enhances wellbeing, and saves lives.

We in the Village Common support the Homes RI Coalition in urging that voters be given an opportunity to approve *at least* a \$150 million Housing Bond for low- and moderate-income housing.

Our state's red-hot housing market is crushing many Rhode Islanders. Older adults — particularly those who are caregivers — often feel hemmed in by low incomes and soaring costs. Many cope bravely with their financial stresses, but fears for the future take a toll on their health. Feelings of financial desperation multiply age-related risks of heart disease, stroke, and dementia.

Rhode Island's huge shortfall in low- and moderate-income housing is a fact. Data from 2021 showed Rhode Island last among the fifty states in construction of new housing units per thousand residents. The Housing Fact Book for 2023 shows that our state has an acute shortage of rental homes that are affordable and available to households with low incomes. More than fifty-six thousand renters are "cost-burdened" or "severely cost-burdened," meaning that they must spend more than a third or even more than half of their income on housing. Many are wage-earners hold one or more full-time service jobs.

Under the leadership of Speaker Joseph Shekarchi, the House of Representatives has made great strides toward addressing Rhode Island's chronic housing crisis. Bond issues and significant housing legislation you have enacted in the last three years have begun to make a real difference. A \$150-million bond will not finish the job, but with interest rates finally falling, voters in November deserve an opportunity to build upon progress you and they have already made.

On behalf of The Village Common, I urge the Committee on Finance to *increase Housing Opportunity Bond in Article 5, Question 3, to \$150 Million.*

Respectfully,



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