



February 29th, 2024

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

RE: Support for H7225, Article 5, Question 3

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

Reclaim Rhode Island supports Article 5, Question 3, which would put a bond to fund housing production on the ballot this November. We thank Governor McKee and Secretary Pryor for proposing this bond, but it does not go far enough - we join housing advocates across Rhode Island in urging the legislature to increase the amount of the bond to \$150 million dollars.

Reclaim RI organizes poor and working class tenants across the state, from West Warwick to Woonsocket. Tenants are facing rents they cannot afford, eviction, homelessness, and deplorable and unsafe conditions that cause harms like the lead poisoning of children. When they organize to fight back, slumlords threaten them with eviction. We cannot allow slumlords like Pioneer Investments to be this state's landlord of last resort: we need the public sector to take a lead role in solving this crisis.

Solving this housing crisis will require multiple approaches, new tools, and leadership with open and innovative minds. We urge the legislature to set aside substantial funding for a new generation of mixed-income public housing development as well as direct funding to the state's public housing authorities to repair and expand their traditional public housing stock. This new publicly-owned housing should also create good-paying jobs for Rhode Island construction workers building green, zero-emissions buildings.

We strongly oppose any proposal to dedicate the housing bond to any single funding stream. Any proposal to unduly restrict housing funding to traditional channels will make it impossible to fund public housing authorities at the level required. We believe it is important to dedicate a large portion of the housing bond directly to public housing authorities and also towards a public developer.

To that end, New York University's Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy is currently conducting a study for the Department of Housing to explore the viability of various public housing development models from around the United States and the world. Secretary Pryor has made it clear that interim findings will be available in April or May so that they can inform the legislature's budgeting decisions, particularly with regard to the housing bond.

We are living in a time of severe housing crisis and also of extraordinary innovation by public housing leaders in Montgomery County, Maryland, New York City, Atlanta, and Cambridge, Massachusetts. We urge you to dedicate substantial portions of this housing bond to a revolving fund that will finance new mixed-income public housing in addition to financing for traditional public housing rehabilitation and expansion.

Sincerely,

**Reclaim RI**