



**Testimony Re: H-7225, Article 5, Question 3 Relating to Affordable Housing  
House Finance Committee  
February 29, 2024  
Stephanie Geller, Deputy Director**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports Article 5, Question 3 in the Governor's proposed budget. This question would provide for a bond referendum which would authorize the issuance of a \$100 million Housing and Community Opportunity Bond to increase affordable and middle income housing production, support community revitalization, and promote home ownership.

**In 2022, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Rhode Island (including utilities) was \$1,996 per month. A worker would have to earn \$38.38 an hour and work 40 hours a week year-round to be able to afford this rent without a cost burden. In 2022, this hourly wage was more than three times the state's minimum wage of \$12.25 per hour.**

**Rhode Island has a shortage of about 24,000 rental homes that are affordable and available to households with extremely low incomes. With jobs that pay family-sustaining wages and affordable housing both in short supply in Rhode Island, many low-income families must choose between paying their rent and meeting their families' other basic needs, so they skimp on food, compromising their children's health and development, and in the worst cases, families are forced into homelessness. In 2022, 280 families with 559 children stayed at an emergency shelter, domestic violence shelter, or transitional housing program in Rhode Island. And on January 20, 2023, there were 176 families with 357 children in the shelter queue awaiting shelter.**

**We must prioritize creating housing for low-income households, who face significant challenges in finding affordable homes. It is crucial that if approved by the General Assembly, the housing bond funds be explicitly approved to produce and preserve affordable homes for low and moderate income households - up to 80% AMI for rental, and up to 120% AMI for homeownership units (following the State's definition of LMI housing).**

The State already has an effective program for distributing funds from approved housing bonds, Building Homes Rhode Island. The State's Housing Resources Commission has oversight to ensure that funding through BHRI prioritizes and is distributed efficiently to address the housing needs of our communities.

All children need a safe, affordable, stable home in which to eat, sleep, play and grow and increasing the availability of affordable housing across the state will help meet this need.

We urge the Committee to support this budget article and question (Article 5, Question 3) and consider increasing the proposed amount to \$150 million to produce and preserve affordable homes for low and moderate income Rhode Islanders.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.