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April 29, 2026

Honorable Marvin Abney
Chair, House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island State House, 82 Smith Street, Providence RI 02903
Re: Support for H7803 – State Funded Rental Subsidy Program

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ben Darby and I live in Providence. I am writing to express my strong support for H7803, which would establish a state-funded rental subsidy program in Rhode Island.

I began working in homelessness services 11 years ago at Boston Health Care for the Homeless, and currently work at Women's Development Corporation, which is a non-profit affordable housing developer. Before working at WDC, I was the Continuum of Care planner at Rhode Island Housing.

The state has made significant progress in recent years when it comes to expanding housing supply. But, for many of our most vulnerable residents, particularly those with extremely low incomes or disabilities who are experiencing homelessness, the housing we are building is still financially out of reach.

This bill addresses that gap, and cuts to the root cause of homelessness. Homelessness in Rhode Island, and nationally, is driven by a lack of housing that is affordable for the lowest-income and most vulnerable residents.

I also want to emphasize that this is not only the right thing to do, but it is also the fiscally responsible thing to do. We know that homelessness is extraordinarily expensive for our public systems. When people do not have stable housing, they are far more likely to rely on emergency shelters, hospital rooms, crisis behavioral health services, and other costly interventions. This is especially true for those who are the most vulnerable – those experiencing homelessness with disabilities.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to submit this testimony, and for your hard work making important decisions as we look to shape a more affordable and dignified future for our state – it is with your support that we can help make sure all Rhode Island residents are stably housed.

Sincerely,

Ben Darby