



March 18, 2025

The Honorable Robert E. Craven, Sr.
Chair, House Judiciary
Rhode Island State House, 82 Smith Street, Providence RI 02903

Re: In Support of House Bill 5921 – *Relating to Towns and Cities – Housing Maintenance and Occupancy Code*

Dear Chair Craven and Members of the Committee:

The mission of the Housing Network of Rhode Island (HNRI) is to increase the supply of safe, healthy, and affordable homes in thriving communities. We currently have 18 nonprofit developer members who own and operate more than 7,000 rental homes for low- and moderate-income Rhode Islanders. We also serve as the backbone for Homes RI, a coalition of more than 80 organizations who support our mission to increase the supply of and access to affordable homes. I am writing to express support for H-5921, sponsored by Representative Cruz, which seeks to strengthen housing maintenance and occupancy regulations in Rhode Island and enable recourse for the tenant upon the notice of a second code violation.

Housing code violations are a frequent driver of landlord-tenant disputes and unfortunately are often a precursor to evictions. Legislation that strengthens and clarifies the responsibility of both tenants and landlords when there is an alleged code violation can only serve to benefit each party, to mitigate misunderstandings and help to hasten the resolution of issues. In the proposed legislation, the tenant would be allowed to place their rent into an escrow-bearing account upon the notice of a second code violation, until the issue is resolved. This provision can help increase accountability for landlords, improve living conditions, and empower tenants to advocate without fear of retaliation. Ensuring that landlords can maintain safe, habitable properties is essential for public health and housing stability.

Within the legislation, it may be helpful to make more explicit which party will be responsible for maintaining the escrow-bearing account, and to add clarification to the procedures for distributing the escrowed funds once the alleged violations have been corrected. During this time, would the landlord also be prohibited from filing an eviction for nonpayment of rent?

We thank the honorable members of the Committee for consideration of my comments. As always, I am happy to answer any questions and can be reached at 401-721-5680 ext. 104 or mlodge@housingnetworkri.org.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melina Lodge". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Melina Lodge, Executive Director