

## Written Testimony in Support of H 5299

March 24, 2025

Dear Chairperson and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Kathleen Murray and I regret I cannot attend your meeting in person. Please instead accept this letter in support of House Bill 5299, introduced by Representative Joseph M. McNamara.

Rhode Island is facing a major shortage of housing, and the state's leading policy and research organization on the topic, HousingWorks RI, estimates that we need approximately 24,000 units of housing over the next decade to address housing needs. What that figure does not take into consideration is what would happen to the existing housing in places where Rhode Islanders live on leased land, when that land comes up for sale. In Gaspee Point, Warwick, there are approximately 300 families living in homes providing imperative and stable, affordable housing, but the land is leased. When that land comes up for sale, what will happen?

H 5299 is important legislation because it will help Rhode Islanders who live on leased land navigate the complexities of land purchase. In places like Gaspee Point, current residents face the risk of displacement when leased land is sold to outside corporate entities. Despite having the right of first refusal, homeowners' associations – made up of community volunteers, with limited resources and expertise, and no staff – often struggle to navigate the legal and financial barriers, making it difficult to secure ownership of the leased land provided for in this chapter. H 5299 directly addresses this issue by directing Rhode Island Housing, the Infrastructure Bank and other appropriate public and private entities to investigate and remove obstacles that prevent homeowners from exercising their right of first refusal.

By passing this bill, the General Assembly will ensure that residents in communities like ours can remain in their homes. It will help to protect existing, affordable housing, assist aging residents to age in place, retain the character of our communities, and prevent the uncertainty and financial hardship that often accompany land sales to outside investors. Homeownership should provide stability, not uncertainty. This legislation aligns with Rhode Island's broader efforts to promote housing security and sustainable homeownership.

I urge the committee to support H 5299 and take this meaningful step to protect homeowners and their communities. Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully,

*Kathleen Murray*

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