



April 8, 2025

Representative Stephen M Casey, Chair

House Municipal Government and Housing Committee

Rhode Island State House

Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: Testimony in Support of H 5793, H 5794, H 5795, H 5796, H 5797, H 5798, H5799, H 5800, H 5801, H 5802, H 5803, and H 5804

On behalf of United Way Rhode Island, we support Speaker Shekarchi's Housing Package, ensuring every Rhode Islander has access to safe and affordable housing. Through the LIFT UNITED initiative of our LIVE UNITED 2025 Strategic Plan, we are committed to dismantling the barriers that impede equitable access to secure, quality homes. We believe that stable housing is a fundamental human right and the cornerstone of economic security, healthy communities, and long-term prosperity for every Rhode Islander.

This package represents an opportunity to transform the housing landscape by incentivizing development, clarifying zoning and land use policies, and streamlining permitting and regulatory processes, all while centering on affordable and accessible housing. By expanding access to safe and affordable homes, these bills strengthen support services, providing essential resources that empower individuals and families to achieve long-term stability. This legislation paves the way for more resilient communities and promotes socioeconomic mobility across Rhode Island.

Encouraging new housing development through financial incentives is a crucial step forward. H 5793, which provides a three-year delay in the revaluation of the assessments for new housing units, will improve developer tax predictability and help accelerate the creation of much-needed housing, particularly in communities experiencing shortages. This bill can spur investment in Rhode Island's housing market by reducing financial barriers and supporting long-term economic growth.

Zoning and land use policies play a key role in shaping the availability and affordability of housing. H 5794 streamlines permitting requirements, reducing administrative burdens while maintaining

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community integrity. Similarly, H 7595 ensures municipalities issue zoning certificates within 20 days, removing unnecessary delays hindering housing production. H 5796 facilitates higher-density development in areas with existing public infrastructure, including much-needed accessory-dwelling units (ADUs). H 5797 defines "co-living housing," paving the way for innovative shared living arrangements that maximize space and affordability. H 5798 ensures zoning ordinances accommodate attached single-family dwellings, increasing housing options and affordability. H 5799 enables the redevelopment of vacant lots while preserving neighborhood character and providing community input. Additionally, H 5800 allows residential development in commercial districts, promoting vibrant, fully accessible communities that integrate housing and economic growth.

Affordable and specialized housing must remain a priority. H 5801 restructures density bonus calculations to support municipal subsidies, introduces an optional master plan process to standardize development, and provides incentives for municipalities to develop age-restricted housing, such as 55+ and 62+ developments, all of which are necessary to ensure equitable access to housing for low and moderate-income Rhode Islanders. H 5802 unlocks state-owned, underutilized properties for housing development and enables nonprofit organizations to participate in increasing our housing stock. Both bills are critical in addressing the housing needs of Rhode Island's most vulnerable populations.

Finally, streamlining permitting and regulatory processes is essential to overcoming barriers to housing development. H 5803 establishes an electronic permitting system, creating a more transparent, efficient, and accessible process across state and local agencies while reducing delays and administrative burdens. H 5804 ensures consistent enforcement of building standards by establishing a centralized state building-code office, providing a more predictable regulatory environment for housing developers.

Housing is a fundamental right, and these bills take significant steps toward addressing our state's housing crisis. United Way of Rhode Island urges the General Assembly to pass these critical measures to remove barriers to housing development, streamline regulatory processes, and prioritize affordability. We stand ready to support these efforts and work collaboratively to ensure every Rhode Islander has access to a secure, high-quality home.

Sincerely,

Cortney Nicolato

President and CEO, United Way Rhode Island

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