



March 26, 2026

The Honorable Carol McEntee, Chairwoman
House Committee on Judiciary
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence RI 02903

Re: Support for H8101

Dear Chairwoman McEntee and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Housing Network of Rhode Island (HNRI) and our alliance of members and partners serving low- and moderate-income Rhode Islanders, I write to express our support for **H8101**, legislation that makes thoughtful and necessary updates to Rhode Island's Abandoned Property Act to ensure the law is used as intended. The current definition within State law creates some ambiguity around appropriate application and has result has had some unintended harmful consequences. If passed, H8101 would make clear what constitutes genuinely abandoned, unsafe, or nuisance properties while protecting responsible property owners.

The Abandoned Property Act can be an important tool to address blighted, problem properties when used appropriately. Unfortunately, in recent years the absence of clear statutory standards has enabled the misuse of this process, resulting in properties which have no code violations or other infractions being targeted under the Law and subject to petition.

There have been documented instances where a property that had been offered for redevelopment through RI Housing has become subject to such a petition. The resulting delays created uncertainty and ultimately caused the development opportunity to collapse, forcing RI Housing to restart the process from the beginning—losing valuable time, resources, and the opportunity to deliver much-needed affordable homes to Rhode Islanders. In a state already facing a housing shortage, these unnecessary disruptions and have real and lasting impacts.

There have also been documented instances of owner-occupied properties being inappropriately subjected to a petition, despite the property being occupied and without any code violations. Given the high cost of entry into the homeownership market, homeowners often lack the financial means to also tackle costly and complicated legal battles, and do not usually have the technical knowledge to fully understand the nature or implications of such petitions to self-resolve them. Without appropriate safeguards, this process can be misused in ways that create confusion, fear, and significant financial risk for those least able to

absorb it. Improperly applied, these petitions could destabilize homeownership for low-income Rhode Islanders and erode trust in systems meant to protect them.

H8101 strengthens due process protections, ensures petitions focus only on properties with documented violations, and clarifies key definitions to prevent misuse of the statute. These reforms strike an important balance between enabling action on problematic properties and safeguarding responsible homeowners.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation. I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have and can be reached at 401-721-5680 ext. 104 or mlodge@housingnetworkri.org.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melina Lodge".

Melina Lodge, Executive Director