

February 16, 2022

Representative Raymond Hull  
Chair, House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing  
State House  
Providence, RI 02903

**Re: H6638 An Act Relating To Towns and Cities—Zoning Ordinances**

Dear Chair Hull,

On behalf of HousingWorks RI at Roger Williams University, I write to raise concerns regarding H6638, which seeks to prohibit single-family residential zoning in municipalities with populations of over 20,000 and mandate that those municipalities adopt zoning regulations for middle housing in single-family residential zones.

HousingWorks RI is a respected source of information about housing in Rhode Island. We conduct research and analyze data to inform public policy, develop communications strategies, and promote dialogue about the relationship between housing and the state's economic future and improved health and educational outcomes.

We greatly appreciate the sponsors' intention to expand the supply of homes affordable to most Rhode Islanders by mandating denser forms of zoning in larger municipalities. Several years ago HousingWorks RI began an examination of local comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances in all 39 municipalities in order to provide the full context of residential affordability and development across the state. We are continuing this research now by looking at the usage of these ordinances to ensure they are producing housing and seeking to devise best practices when not.

Rhode Island has a long history of planning research and guidance that can help inform this important work. In 2005, the state updated its land use policies and plan. *Land Use 2025* promotes the development of Growth Centers across the state, where economic growth and diverse housing stock could stop the spread of sprawl and protect our open space. From 2013-2015, with funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and Environmental Protection Agency's Sustainable Communities program, there was a substantial effort at examining housing and the economy that resulted in several Growth Centers studies and Opportunity Maps. In 2018, HousingWorks RI, collaborated with Grow Smart RI and RWU's Community Partnerships Center to publish a study of potential Transit Oriented Development nodes.

Both of our neighboring states of Massachusetts and Connecticut, as other states across the country, have begun to examine and change local and state laws for similar purposes noted in this bill. However, most of these laws have sought direct ties to proximity to public transportation. While this bill does mention an "urban growth boundary" and "city centers", these are undefined concepts in Rhode Island General Law.

In our many years of experience in making local presentations on housing affordability, it is abundantly clear that extensive public education and dialogue is called for in approaching a topic as sacrosanct as single-family housing in the American psyche. The last result we would want to see from this bill is the misuse of its intentions to further stymie solutions to our state's housing crisis.

At this time, we would suggest that H6638 be held for further study and referred to the now active Land Use Commission. We look forward to assisting in whatever way we can. Thank you for your consideration, and should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 401-276-4815.

Respectfully,



Brenda Clement  
Director