



January 25, 2024

The Honorable Stephen Casey
Chair, House Committee on Housing and Municipal Government Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Support of H7062

Dear Chairman Casey and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary:

On behalf of the Housing Network of Rhode Island, our member agencies, and the low income Rhode Islanders we serve, I write to offer our strong support of **H7062**. Building upon language passed in 2022 related to Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), **H7062** seeks to further refine that law by providing uniform zoning and design standards, streamlines the municipal approval process and language that clarifies when ADUs are permissible by-right.

We applaud Speaker Shekarchi's sustained leadership on urgent housing issues and his continued focus on driving change to improve access to and affordability of homes for hundreds of thousands of Rhode Islanders. We also extend our thanks Representative June Speakman and other bill sponsors for their leadership in introducing this bill, which represents an important step forward in making our State a place where all Rhode Islanders have access to safe and decent homes that are affordable to them in the community of their choice.

Now for the fourth year in a row, the high, unattainable cost of housing and the growing need for more affordable housing in this state has taken center stage. Historically low inventory of homes for sale and for rent coupled with exploding demand for housing have driven housing costs out of reach for many Rhode Islanders, particularly our lowest income households. Decades long reductions in building permit activity, restrictive land use policies, low vacancy rates, and the state's chronic underinvestment in affordable housing have all been major contributing factors to the lack of available homes, the high cost of housing, and ultimately, housing unaffordability. In October 2023, Zillow's Rent Report found that Providence experienced the highest rent increase nationwide with a 7.5% increase over last year. Moreover, since 2019, Providence rents had increased 48%, to a whopping \$2,074 per month for a 2-bedroom apartment! In order for a renter household to be able to afford this level of rent, they would need roughly \$6,667 per month (\$80,000 annually) in income.

As a state, we are at a pinnacle moment in time – we must act now if we hope to prevent us from falling further into housing crisis. **H7062** is one critical piece of this puzzle. Building ADUs create housing options that are responsive to a sustained demographic trend towards smaller household formation and allows us to ensure that populations typically represented in small households - older

adults, people with disabilities and young adults are not cost burdened and over housed. ADUs represent a tangible solution to our efforts to increase the overall density of housing in our state with minimal impact on the existing built environment, and relatively quick as compared to development of more traditional homes. The language provided in **H7062** as it relates to clarification and standardization of design and review procedures provides necessary support to our municipal partners in their implementation role.

We have offered some suggestions to the bill sponsor for minor tweaks to the language that would help ensure that efforts to expand the housing supply are truly for the benefit of Rhode Island residents as well as some additional points of clarification on the bill's more technical aspects. We looking forward to working with the sponsor and our colleagues to find common ground and move a bill forward that addresses the housing needs of our state.

The only way to relieve some of the pressure on the housing market, reduce skyrocketing home prices, and house Rhode Islanders is to build more homes, and **H7062** provides one path forward towards that end. Thank you for the opportunity to share my support of this important piece of legislation with this Committee and for your consideration of **H7062**.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Melina Lodge
Executive Director