



March 12, 2024

The Honorable Steve M. Casey
Chair, House Municipal Government and Housing Committee
Rhode Island State House, 82 Smith Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: Support for HB 7982 – An Act Relating to Towns and Cities – Zoning Ordinances;
HB 7983 – An Act Relating to Health and Safety – State Building Code;
HB 7985 – An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government – Department of Administration; and
HB 7986 – An Act Relating to Property – Abandoned Property

Dear Chair Casey and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of ONE Neighborhood Builders, a Rhode Island housing and community development organization based in Providence, I write in strong support of the bills being heard tonight that are part of Speaker Shekarchi's bill package: House Bills 7982, 7983, 7985, and 7986. These bills would enable technical changes that would incentivize the production, preservation, and protection of quality, affordable housing in Rhode Island.

Access to quality housing that a household can afford is necessary for every Rhode Islander. Our housing crisis is a significant problem, but we know how to address it. Thus, Rhode Island must leverage every tool available to us to produce, preserve, and protect affordable housing at the scale we need.

Rhode Island [had](#) the lowest per capita rate of new housing construction of any U.S. state in 2022, and Rhode Island [has](#) a shortage of approximately 24,000 rental homes that are available and affordable to households earning extremely low incomes (for a household of four people, this is an annual income of \$31,000). ONE Neighborhood Builders has built almost 600 rental and for-sale homes for low- and moderate-income households, and our community development and non-profit colleagues have built hundreds more. However, this is not enough housing to close this gap in need for affordable units.

Our state legislature has a critical role to play in incentivizing the development of quality, safe, and affordable housing for Rhode Islanders. Speaker Shekarchi, Representative Cortvriend, Representative Cruz, Representative Spears, Representative Batista, and the entire House of Representatives have prioritized housing production and affordability as two of the most important policy issues our state must address. The House's leadership on this issue is moving our state forward in a meaningful way, but since these are large and complex problems, we need to continue to advance multi-pronged solutions.

I strongly urge the Committee to support House Bills 7982, 7983, 7985, and 7986 to advance quality, affordable housing in Rhode Island.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Hawkins", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jennifer Hawkins
President & CEO, ONE Neighborhood Builders