



March 12, 2024

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

Re: Support of H7982, H7983, H7985, and H7986

Dear Chairman Casey and Members of the House Municipal Government and Housing Committee:

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 **H7982, H7983, H7985, and H7986**. 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 thank the bill sponsors for their leadership in introducing these bills, which represent important steps 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.

During the last three legislative sessions, 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 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, the state's chronic underinvestment in affordable housing and inadequate worker wages have all been major contributing factors to the lack of available homes, and ultimately, housing unaffordability. In January 2024, the RI Realtors Association reported the median priced single family home was \$441,750 (increase of 12.87% from 1-2023), which to afford, a household would require an annual household income of approximately \$134,000. Multi-family homes are even more out of reach with a median price of \$475,000 in January 2024 (increase of 7.95% from 1-2023). The only way alleviate some of the pressure on the housing market, reduce skyrocketing home prices, and house Rhode Islanders is to build more homes.

H7982 and H7983 seek to amend various provisions within law to provide greater clarity to administrative components that have tangible effects on housing development. **H7985** provides for the creation of a critical tool to aid in better policy making at both the local and state level. Lastly, **H7986** aims to build upon and maximize existing assets – abandoned properties – by requiring greater transparency in the availability of those opportunities at the municipal level. In order to build more homes, Rhode Island must become more adept at identifying opportunities for redevelopment of existing sites, reducing barriers to production, and streamlining and clarifying processes that delay production and drive cost increases. **H7982, H7983, H7985, and H7986** all fulfill one of these functions.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my support of these important pieces of legislation with this Committee and for your consideration of **H7982, H7983, H7985, and H7986**. I am available to answer any questions you might have and can be reached at 401-721-5680 ext. 104 or mlodge@housingnetworkri.org.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melina Lodge".

Melina Lodge
Executive Director