



March 12, 2024

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey
Chair
House Municipal Government and Housing Committee

RE: *H 7982— “An Act Relating to Towns and Cities – Zoning Ordinances”*
H 7983 – “An Act relating to Health and Safety – State Building Code”
H 7985 – “An Act relating to State Affairs and Government – Department of Administration”
H 7986 – “An Act Relating to Property – Abandoned Property”

Dear Chair Casey and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing the Rhode Island Association of REALTORS® (RIAR) to comment on H 7982, H 7983, H 7985 & H 7986. RIAR is once again grateful to support Speaker Shekarchi’s goal of creating accessible housing at all price levels throughout the State of Rhode Island.

Rhode Island’s real estate industry plays a critical role in the success of our state’s economy. In fact, real estate represents 17 percent of Rhode Island’s gross state product, according to the National Association of REALTORS®, which equates to more than \$12 billion.¹ Additionally, a typical home sale in Rhode Island generates \$125,500 in economic activity. However, as more residents seek homeownership opportunities, Rhode Island faces stark housing production that is failing to meet the need of today’s household. We are thankful for Speaker Shekarchi’s leadership in addressing the growing housing shortage in Rhode Island.

RIAR supports the following bills:

H 7982 – Ordinances pertaining to wetland buffers

RIAR recognizes the important role wetland buffers play in protecting the conservation of many Rhode Island communities. We are also aware of the challenges local regulations have presented as they relate to the progress of developable land. That is why RIAR believes that a clear, predictable set of guidelines established by the Rhode Island Coastal Management Council and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and endorsed by the amendments in H 7982 removes any confusion related to coastal and freshwater wetland buffers.

¹ [The Economic Impact of Typical Home Sale in Rhode Island](#)

H 7983 – State Building Commissioner

Our association cannot underestimate the important role of the State’s building commissioner and why we believe it is critical is to educate a profession that keeps residents healthy and safe, while embracing development opportunities. At a time when Rhode Island is in desperate need of more housing units, a qualified state building commissioner surrounded by an educated workforce will create predictability for developers, while minimizing conflicting requirements. Additionally, when developers can rely on one set of building codes for planning, designing, purchasing and construction they contribute to the resilience of buildings and help maintain quality of life and property values. As a result, REALTORS® and their clients gain confidence knowing that the health and safety of the community is a priority for building officials and inspectors across Rhode Island.

H 7985 – Geographic Information System (GIS) of land

It is no secret that Rhode Island ranks last nationally for the number of new housing permits. However, providing location and site selection tools for developers and investors to identify opportunities could help categorize new housing opportunities. RIAR believes that access to spatial data through a statewide GIS system can attract investment, spur development, and promote job creation. Additionally, RIAR looks forward to working with Speaker Shekarchi and his team on using this resource with the State-Wide Multiple Listing Service.

H 7986 – Abandoned Property

RIAR applauds the sponsors of H 7986, as the complexities surrounding abandoned property can negatively impact a community’s character, reputation, and real estate values. That is why RIAR works hard to educate our members on local laws that improve quality of life. By requiring cities and towns to publish a list of abandoned properties, the state would be creating new opportunities to develop additional housing units.

In conclusion, RIAR looks forward to partnering with members of the House of Representatives on measures that will provide housing for all. We urge this committee to vote favorably on the aforementioned bills.

Respectfully,



Philip B. Tedesco, RCE, CAE, CIPS
Chief Executive Officer
RI Association of REALTORS®