



State of Rhode Island
DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS REGULATION
Division of Building, Design, and Fire Professionals
560 Jefferson Blvd.
Warwick, RI 02886

March 12, 2024

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

RE: H 7701 -- AN ACT RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- STATE BUILDING CODE --
ADMINISTRATION AND ENFORCEMENT
H 7983 -- AN ACT RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- STATE BUILDING CODE

Dear Chair Casey:

We write on behalf of the Department of Business Regulation to express support for the aforementioned legislation, which would ensure the State Building Office and the State Building Code Commissioner are contributing as much as possible to shared goals related to housing development, production, and preservation.

Broadly, both bills before you today seek to address a known problem – a shortage of qualified and available building officials at the local level, which often contributes to delays in permitting, inspections, and certification of new buildings – particularly new residential developments. This lack of capacity is among a number of structural issues impeding progress on the state's housing goals, and this legislation takes aim at it in two ways.

First, these bills would enhance the powers and duties of the State Building Code Commissioner relative to the certification and authorization of local building officials and inspectors. At present, the Commissioner's role is limited largely to the processing and evaluation of renewal applications, which occur on a three-year cycle, and coordination with the State Building Code Standards Committee in the event of appeals or contested matters. These bills would more explicitly empower the Commissioner to oversee the certification of local building officials and, importantly, to step in temporarily in the event of a vacancy at the municipal level. Additionally, the legislation would empower the Commissioner to move towards a uniform interpretation of the state building code among local building officials; this would improve consistency, predictability, and rationality among and between jurisdictions and eliminate interpretation-related barriers to development to the extent that they arise.

Second, both bills introduce an innovative concept into law – the creation of a State Building Code Academy. This new unit within the State Building Office would act as an accelerator for the training and development of local building inspectors and officials that will be ready to fill the current need in a timely fashion. Fortunately, the SBO has already begun to pilot this concept in the first quarter of this calendar year; the first course offering of the Code Academy (Building Inspector 1) spanned 10 weeks, with 8 local building inspectors in attendance, representing 5 different municipalities. The course consists of 20 in-person hours, a final exam and covers the Rhode Island residential code. This exciting new initiative has proven to be an extremely valuable opportunity to ensure uniform enforcement of the state building code. The Academy will be offering Building Inspector 2, focusing on the commercial code, and is expected to

start sometime in May 2024. The concepts introduced in this legislation offer an exciting opportunity to scale the Code Academy and make its offerings more widely available across our state.


The Department would note that the successful and timely implementation of both of these core provisions may require additional budgetary allocations in FY 2026. We stand ready to partner with the Administration and the General Assembly's fiscal staff to detail these requirements further in the coming weeks and months.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony and we are available at your convenience to further discuss this legislation.

Sincerely,



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Cc: Honorable Members of the House Committee on Housing and Municipal Government
Rep. June Speakman
Rep. Cherie Cruz
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Elizabeth K. Dwyer, Esq., Director, Department of Business Regulation