



May 21, 2024

Representative Stephen M. Casey, Chair
House Municipal Government and Housing Committee Members

RE: Testimony in Support of House Bill 7985, An Act Relating to State Affairs
and Government – Department of Administration

United Way of Rhode Island (UWRI) is writing to express its support for House Bill 7985. The bill provides for the establishment of comprehensive Rhode Island geographic information system, the utility of which cannot be overstated. UWRI's partnerships with nonprofits dedicated to improving housing availability and stability have so much to gain from the implementation of a publicly available key to Rhode Island's land uses and zoning districts. UWRI is committed to securing affordable, accessible housing for Rhode Islanders, and unifying our data around land use is an important step towards sustainable development.

According to the Rhode Island Department of Health, at least 24% of renters and owners in Rhode Island are cost burdened; spending more than 30% of their annual income on housing. The households that are cost burdened may be forced to choose between the cost of housing and other essentials, such as food, utilities, and healthcare. The proposed legislation would ameliorate this inequity and advance housing affordability for all Rhode Islanders.

UWRI encourages you to consider the consequences of inaction on housing affordability measures. The rapid increase in rents has priced our neighbors out of their homes, and the housing stock shortage has kept our neighbors homeless through dangerous weather events. Rhode Island must take every step possible towards ending the housing crisis, including improving access to reliable, up-to-date land use and zoning data through the creation of a state GIS resource.

Very best,
Peggy Desjarlais
Program Officer, Housing and Economic Development Policy

