

March 10, 2025

Chair Stephen Casey
House Municipal Government & Housing Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: In Support of House Bill 5310

Dear Chairman Casey and Members of the Committee,


I am writing to offer strong support for House Bill 5310, the Rhode Island Housing and Conservation Trust Fund Act. This bill supports a proven model for coordinating and funding the two land use priorities that an overwhelming majority of Rhode Islanders support: increasing the availability of affordable housing, and preserving our important farms, forests and open spaces. The bill will update and strengthen the original RI Housing & Conservation Trust Fund Act that was established by the General Assembly in 1990 but holds off on creating funding mechanisms for FY2025/26. The bill sponsors and the growing coalition of land trusts and housing advocates who support this bill recognize that developing a strong and effective Advisory Board is the most important next step in creating an impactful state-wide program.

The framework for the RI Housing and Conservation Trust Fund Act is based on Vermont's highly successful Vermont Conservation & Housing Board model, which was established in 1987 and has had spectacular results. Basically, the Act provides steady long-term funding through a minimal transfer tax on certain land purchases, with the resulting funds dedicated proportionally to affordable housing, forests and open space, and farms. An Advisory Board of qualified representatives from the housing, natural resources and farming sectors works together to coordinate the allocation of funds and prioritization of shared land use goals. The success of the Vermont model is just one proof point that the conservation of our important natural resources can and should be coordinated with—not opposed to – the development of affordable housing.

In my 8 years of service as a Commissioner on the state's Agricultural Land Preservation Commission, I have seen less than a handful of conservation projects in which farmland conservation plans actually conflicted with the development of affordable housing. Rhode Island has enough land resources to support our affordable housing needs, our natural resource conservation needs, and our agricultural needs, but **ONLY** if we develop an effective method of incentivizing and funding collaboration across all three land resource needs. History has shown that free market forces alone will not lead to land allocation decisions that support what all Rhode Islanders want – **a safe and affordable place to live with access to clean air, clean water, open spaces, and healthy food.**

I hope the Committee will support this bill as the right step towards strengthening a badly needed state-wide model for collaborative land use development.

Thank you,


Diane Lynch