



March 11, 2025

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey, Chair

House Municipal Government and Housing Committee

Rhode Island Statehouse

Providence, 02903

**RE: Testimony In Support of House Bill Nos. 5796, 5797, 5798, 5799, 5800 & 5949 – An Act
Relating to Towns and Cities – Zoning Ordinances and Subdivision of Land**

Dear Chair Casey and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, I am writing to express our strong support for House Bill Nos. 5796, 5797, 5798, 5799, 5800, and 5949—each of which plays a vital role in modernizing local zoning ordinances and expanding access to safe, affordable housing. These bills align with our **LIFT UNITED** initiative under the **LIVE UNITED 2025 Strategic Plan**, through which we work to dismantle structural barriers that limit economic opportunity, particularly for historically marginalized communities.

The urgency of this work is reinforced by both statewide housing data and the needs we hear from community members every day. According to the 2024 Rhode Island Housing Factbook, our state must build **24,000 new housing units by 2030** to meet demand, while nearly **36% of Rhode Island households are cost-burdened**, spending over 30% of their income on housing. At United Way, the need is echoed in our 211 call center data—**between 2024 and 2025, United Way 211 and The Point received nearly 29,000 housing-related inquiries**, including requests for shelter, rental assistance, and utility support. These figures underscore the deep strain Rhode Islanders face and the importance of comprehensive, community-informed zoning reform.

House Bill 5796 adds an additional purpose to the list of provisions that zoning ordinances must address, helping municipalities respond more proactively to modern housing challenges.

House Bill 5797 introduces a definition for “co-living housing” and ensures it is considered in local zoning. This model supports cost-effective living arrangements, particularly valuable for seniors, single adults, and individuals facing housing insecurity.

[Uniting our community and resources to build racial equity and opportunities for all Rhode Islanders.](#)

House Bill 5798 requires ordinances to permit attached single-family dwellings—unlocking a broader range of housing options, especially for working families and older adults who are seeking to downsize and age in place.

House Bill 5799 modernizes the subdivision process to include oversized lots under certain conditions and introduces the option for “neighborhood character-based modifications,” helping municipalities better respond to localized needs without creating exclusionary barriers.

House Bill 5800 supports residential development in commercial districts—an important step in promoting mixed-use neighborhoods, revitalizing main streets, and creating more housing near transit, jobs, and services.

House Bill 5949 formally affirms the duty to affirmatively further fair housing as a zoning principle. This inclusion reinforces the importance of equity in local planning, helping municipalities center inclusion and access in their housing decisions.

Housing is the foundation upon which families build their futures. By supporting House Bill Nos. 5796, 5797, 5798, 5799, 5800, and 5949, Rhode Island can make meaningful progress toward a future where every resident has the opportunity to live in a safe, affordable home. This comprehensive zoning reform package is an investment in stability, resilience, and justice—reducing long-term reliance on emergency assistance, strengthening our local economy, and fostering a more equitable housing landscape for all. We urge you to support this legislative package and stand with us in building a Rhode Island where secure housing is truly within reach for every community.

Sincerely,

Elijah McLean

Manager, Government Relations & Policy

United Way of Rhode Island