



OCEAN STATE CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

1944 Warwick Ave, Warwick, RI 02889 ~ 175 Main St, Pawtucket, RI 02860

Phone: 401-738-1013 ~ VP: 244-7792 ~ Website: oscil.org

March 11, 2024

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey
Chair, House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing
Rhode Island State House Room 101

RE: Letter in Support of H5949 — An Act Relating To Towns And Cities -- Zoning Ordinance

Dear Chair Casey,

On behalf of The Ocean State Center for Independent Living (OSCIL) RI's GO-To resource center for disability, services resources, and information since 1988, I'm writing you in support of HB5949 An Act Relating To Towns And Cities -- Zoning Ordinance. HB5949 will codify the 2015 US Department of Housing and Urban Development rule entitled "Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing" in state law, an important and much-needed step towards sustaining our state's and our nation's efforts towards identifying and dismantling housing patterns which have historically segregated our communities. The term "Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing," or AFFH, existed as far back as the Fair Housing Act passed by Congress in the 1960s, but was undefined and under-utilized until the Obama Administration. By doing so, the Administration empowered cities, towns, and states to use public funding to create housing which not only addressed housing shortages, but to do so in a way that proactively disrupted housing patterns actively re-entrenching segregation on the basis of race, class, and ability.

However, the first Trump Administration removed this definition and instead directed HUD to implement a new rule titled "Preserving Community and Neighborhood Choice," which reduced AFFH to merely a good-faith effort. While the Biden Administration restored the 2015 rule, President Trump's Secretary of Housing and Urban Development announced in February of this year that they will terminate the AFFH rule once again. This would present a problem to organizations like ours, which rely on strong state and federal laws to actively address long-standing issues that people face when accessing safe, affordable, and fair housing. Specifically, AFFH requires that our zoning codes meet the housing needs of "persons with disabilities, in addition to their families and caretakers, in finding appropriate, accessible housing affordable at their income level." **This is crucial at a time when a disproportionate number of public housing units are one-bedroom and studio units, leaving residents who need live-in caretakers with few options.**



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By codifying AFFH into state law, we are sending a loud and clear message that regardless of the federal administration's policies, the State of Rhode Island remains steadfast in its commitment to undo decades of housing segregation. States like California have already codified AFFH into law, and legislation has been submitted to the Massachusetts General Assembly which would do the same. We need to use the tools of our government to bring communities together, not drive them apart. AFFH is another tool in the toolbox which enables organizations like ours to help in that effort. I urge you to recommend the passage of this bill.

Sincerely,

Beth Pinkham

Beth Pinkham, Associate Director

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing
Nicole McCarty, Esq.