



March 11, 2025

Representative Stephen M. Casey Chair

House Municipal Government and Housing Committee

Testimony in Support of H 5949, An Act Relating to Towns and Cities- Zoning Ordinance

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we express our support for House Bill 5949, which aligns with our commitment to ensuring that all Rhode Islanders have access to economic opportunity and financial stability. Through the **LIFT UNITED** initiative of our **LIVE UNITED 2025** Strategic Plan, we work to remove barriers to financial security, support workforce development, and strengthen pathways to upward mobility. Equity is at the heart of our mission, ensuring historically marginalized communities have the resources to thrive.

We believe that every Rhode Islander deserves safe, stable, and affordable housing in communities of opportunity. Longstanding barriers in zoning and land use policy have contributed to patterns of segregation and housing inequity, disproportionately impacting Low-Income families and BIPOC communities. By explicitly requiring municipalities to affirmatively further fair housing in their zoning decisions, H 5949 takes a critical step toward dismantling those barriers and ensuring all Rhode Islanders have equitable access to housing.

The communities identified in H 5949 align with the populations United Way of Rhode Island centers in our community support and grantmaking work. The Point Senior and Disability Resource Center hears from older Rhode Islanders every day who are struggling to secure housing that is accessible and affordable, and our 211 helpline and outreach team identify housing as the most frequent and serious need across the state. When H 5949 calls these communities out by name, it invites municipalities to consider the nonprofit networks that are already serving these neighbors to collaborate and co-create the housing that is needed to build strong cities and towns.

United Way of Rhode Island is committed to uniting our community and resources to build racial equity and opportunities. This is the right time for the State of Rhode Island to affirm its commitment to fair housing by issuing the call to municipalities to align their zoning law to reflect the needs of their

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communities and prioritize individuals from protected statuses including race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity or expression. Thank you for your careful consideration of H 5949, and for the work you do for Rhode Islanders every day.

Sincerely,

Peggy Desjarlais

Housing and Economic Development Policy

United Way of Rhode Island

Uniting our community and resources to build racial equity and opportunities for all Rhode Islanders

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