



**State of Rhode Island
Lieutenant Governor Sabina Matos**

Testimony in Support of H5949

Given by Lt. Governor Matos to House Municipal Government and Housing Committee

March 11, 2024

Good afternoon, honorable members of the House Municipal Government and Housing Committee. Thank you, Chair Casey, for the opportunity to address the committee. Thank you, Vice Chair Speakman for introducing this legislation on my behalf.

Every person in the State of Rhode Island deserves housing that is safe, habitable, affordable, accessible, and accommodating to their needs and the needs of their family. The Rhode Island Fair Housing Practices Act prohibits housing discrimination on the basis of race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, military status, and even source of income.

And yet despite this, as elected officials, we hear from people all the time who either struggle to access housing, or who live in housing which doesn't meet their needs. By design, the Fair Housing Practices Act is a reactive policy, whereby discriminatory behavior can only be punished once it occurs and once it is reported. Punishment and prevention are two very different things. We also need laws that prevent us from re-enforcing systemic patterns of segregation in our communities in the first place.

When Congress drafted the Fair Housing Act in 1968, they recognized this issue as well. That is why they included in the law a duty for communities to affirmatively further fair housing (AFFH). This means that entities that receive HUD housing are required to take active steps to identify and address segregation in their community.

How HUD chooses to define those steps has changed constantly under different presidential administrations, creating inconsistencies and planning challenges. In 2015, the Obama administration further published rules and regulations for affirmatively furthering fair housing that explicitly tasked HUD grantees with taking meaningful actions to overcome patterns of segregation and foster inclusive communities.

However, the Trump Administration reversed the rule, reducing AFFH to merely a "good-faith" promise that taxpayer dollars won't be used to segregate communities. The Biden Administration re-implemented AFFH, but in February of this year, the Trump Administration once again relegated AFFH to a meaningless promise. This back-and-forth, duck-season-rabbit-season approach to desegregation policies hurts the very same people AFFH was designed to help in the first place.

We want to create a state standard for affirmatively furthering fair housing that will continue across administrations. Our bill codifies the 2015 AFFH rule into state law and reaffirms our state's commitment to