

The Village Common of Rhode Island

Aging Better Together

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT & HOUSING

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey, Chair

Testimony by H. Philip West Jr on March 20, 2025,
in support of 25-H 5229 by Rep. June Speakman, et. al.

RHODE ISLAND HOUSING CHAMPION DESIGNATION

Thank you, Chairman Casey and members of the House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing, for this hearing. **I testify in support of Rep. Speakman's legislation, 25-H 5229, that will create a state housing champion designation.**

My name is H. Philip West, Jr., and I serve as a volunteer lobbyist on behalf of The Village Common of Rhode Island, a statewide non-profit that helps older adults live safely and independently in their homes. We coordinate volunteer services through locally organized and operated villages in Barrington, Burrillville, Cranston, Glocester, Middletown, Newport, Pawtucket, Portsmouth, Providence, Warwick, and Westerly. We are currently helping form new local villages in Bristol-Warren, Exeter, Cumberland, and Jamestown. The Village Common now has 525 members and 355 volunteers. **Our volunteers save lives and money. Our motto is: "Aging Better Together."**

Rep. Speakman's legislation would encourage development of workforce housing, which remains in short supply across the state, by creating a new pro-housing designation in RIGL 42-64-13.3.

Older adults in the Village Common often encounter real difficulty in hiring support personnel they may need during medical crises or for routine home maintenance. The *2024 Housing Fact Book* found—for the first time—that there is no city or town in the state where workers with household incomes under \$100,000 can afford to buy a home. Burrillville remains the only town in Rhode Island where the state's median renting household income (\$45,560) can afford to rent a two-bedroom apartment.

Across the country, state pro-housing designation programs seek to incentivize local jurisdictions to proactively plan for and facilitate housing. Six states have created programs creating such incentives: Massachusetts (2017), California and Utah (2019), Montana, New Hampshire, and New York (2023).

Under New Hampshire's model, Concord proclaims its success with "progressive zoning ordinance and land use regulations which encourage housing development. Specifically, housing is permitted in 14 of the City's 17 zoning districts, or 95% of the City's total land area." The legislation creates carrots for a municipality to upgrade zoning and infrastructure to encourage (rather than resist) workforce housing. Incentives in the bill include tax incentives. A report from the Turner Center at Berkeley compares these programs.

25-H 5229 creates pragmatic incentives for municipalities to embrace development of new housing. Creating a Housing Champion Designation may encourage otherwise reluctant localities to open themselves for workforce and affordable housing. The Village Common urges passage of 25-H 5229.

Respectfully,



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