



March 19, 2025

Representative Stephen M. Casey, Chair

House Municipal Government and Housing

Rhode Island State House

Providence, Rhode Island 02903

**RE: Testimony in Support of House Bill 5801: An Act Relating to Towns and Cities – Low- and Moderate-Income Housing**

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we express our support for House Bill 5801, which aligns with our commitment to ensuring that all Rhode Islanders have access to safe, affordable housing. Through the LIFT UNITED initiative of our LIVE UNITED 2025 Strategic Plan, we are committed to dismantling the barriers that impede equitable access to secure, quality homes. We believe that stable housing is a fundamental human right and the cornerstone of economic stability, healthy communities, and long-term prosperity for historically marginalized populations.

House Bill 5801 changes key provisions in the Low- and Moderate-Income Housing Act in response to implementation challenges at the local level. Developing housing that meets the access and affordability needs of the community is an imperative that requires financial and technical resources provided for in this bill. The use of density bonuses keeps incentives scaled to the municipality and delivers support that wasn't previously possible with the one-size-fits-all approach.

From our seat on the Housing Affordability Commission, United Way of Rhode Island heard Community Development Corporations and nonprofit partners speak to the power of incentivizing municipalities to proactively identify sites for housing and partner with developers to build the housing communities need. Former President and CEO of ONE Neighborhood Builders Jennifer Hawkins detailed the strategy that positioned them to develop 466 affordable apartments and 130 home ownership opportunities, as well as nearly 35,000 square feet of commercial and community space, in late 2023. It's perhaps even more relevant now: we must champion significant and consistent investment in housing production every year, using all tools at our disposal, including state and municipal bonds, direct budget allocation, and expanded state Low Income Housing Tax Credits.

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

Collaboration is the only way to close the gap between Rhode Island's housing needs and our available housing stock. The Low- and Moderate-Income Housing Act can be a powerful tool in bringing state, nonprofit, and private resources together to transform the housing landscape by expanding access to safe and affordable homes, strengthening support services, and providing essential resources that empower individuals and families to achieve long-term stability.

House Bill 5801 introduces an alternative to the planning process with real potential to address a number of challenges faced by private and community developers. The "master plan" option standardizes submission requirements for applicants across municipalities and locks in vestment for a period of two years with the right to extend for another two years. This predictability is exactly what the nonprofits providing permanent supportive housing require to secure funding from multiple sources. Using the Low- and Moderate- Income Housing Act to build a path for development paves the way for more resilient communities and promotes socioeconomic mobility across Rhode Island.

United Way of Rhode Island analyzes policy changes by identifying potential impact on our priority populations, empowering our advocacy to center communities at risk of housing instability. The early 2024 HousingWorks RI presentation to the Housing Affordability Commission identified the housing needs of Rhode Island's older adults that resonated deeply with the experiences of the community resource specialists at The Point Senior and Disability Resource Center. The rates of cost burdens in the older adult community reflect the inaccessibility and unavailability of current housing stock. House Bill 5801 includes a carve out in the footprint guidelines for age restricted housing which allows municipalities to take advantage of incentives for inclusive developments.

Housing is the foundation upon which families build their futures. By supporting House Bill 5801, Rhode Island can make significant strides toward creating a state where every individual can live in a safe, affordable home. This investment in housing stability will reduce long-term reliance on emergency assistance, strengthen our local economy, and promote a more just and equitable society. We urge you to support this measure and join in our commitment to creating a Rhode Island where secure housing is within reach for all.

Sincerely,

Peggy Desjarlais

Housing and Economic Development Policy

United Way of Rhode Island

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