



March 20, 2025

Representative Stephen M. Casey, Chair

House Municipal Government and Housing

Rhode Island State House

Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: Testimony in Support of H 5803: An Act Relating to Health and Safety- State Building Code

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we express our support for House Bill 5803, 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 5803 represents an opportunity to transform the housing development landscape by integrating electronic permitting into every state department that touches land use. This coordination has immediate and lasting implications for the community development corporations which partner with United Way of Rhode Island to provide permanent supportive housing. Electronic permitting means reduced processing time, greater efficiency, and reduced costs for developers, overall reducing administrative burden for. When those nonprofits can submit applications electronically, they can focus on our shared mission of housing our neighbors and providing the support services that empower individuals and families to achieve long-term stability. By addressing critical challenges in housing development, this legislation supports responsive solutions to housing insecurity and promotes socioeconomic mobility across Rhode Island.

From United Way of Rhode Island's seat on the Special Legislative Commission to Study the Entire Area of Land Use, Preservation, Development, Housing, Environment, and Regulation, we've heard Building Code Commissioner James Cambio raise electronic permitting to the front of Rhode Island's opportunities to streamline housing production in every municipality. Adopting electronic permitting for all development applications for subdivision, zoning, and low- and moderate-income housing is a mandate with a strong

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implementation plan for pilot testing, transition support, and technical assistance.

The State Building Office is joined by the RI Builders Association at the Land Use Commission in their identification of permitting and approval processes as a major barrier to housing development in their 2022 presentation, counting the regulatory costs of building a new home at 23.8% of the price.

Streamlining the permitting process of development promises to reduce the cost of housing for Rhode Islanders looking to enter the housing market. United Way of Rhode Island invests in nonprofits dedicated to supporting homeownership for historically marginalized populations, and these nonprofits identify cost as the single highest barrier to homeownership. Our partners in advancing homeownership understand that a resident who owns their home builds generational wealth for their family and invests more directly in their community.

Housing is the foundation on which families build their futures. By supporting House Bill 5803, 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 us in our commitment to creating a Rhode Island where secure housing is within reach for us all.

Sincerely,

Peggy Desjarlais

Housing and Economic Development Policy

United Way of Rhode Island

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