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March 19, 2025

Dear Chairman Casey and House Municipal Government & Housing Committee Members,

My name is Bruce Daigle, 115 Pleasant St., Woonsocket, and I am a member of the *Woonsocket Community-Partnership Task Force on Housing and Homelessness*. Our task force includes 22 members with long experience and expertise in housing, homelessness, community service, public safety, substance abuse, behavioral and mental health care, and government. Chaired by City Councilwoman Valerie Gonzalez, the task force spent nearly two years researching, then writing a detailed report and an action plan to address homelessness in our city.

I am pleased to offer this written testimony in support of this year's 12-bill package on housing introduced by Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi, Committee Chairs June Speakman, Carol Hagen McEntee, Robert Craven, and Arthur Corvese, and Representatives Cherie Cruz, Jason Knight, Tina Spears, and Thomas Noret. The bills in this year's package address at least three of the eight goals articulated by our Task Force in the Action Plan that we released to the public in late October of last year. (Each of these bills is listed below, along with the action steps in our plan that each bill aligns with, denoted in red).

We shared our report and our plan with Speaker Shekarchi last fall, and while I have no idea whether that had any impact on the development of this year's legislative package, we're delighted to see that every one of these bills will have a positive effect on providing more affordable housing in our city and throughout Rhode Island.

We greatly appreciate the work that Speaker Shekarchi and the representatives who have worked with him during these past five years have done to tackle this enormously complex issue. We pledge to work with him and other state and city leaders until every resident of this state can afford a comfortable place to live without sacrificing other life necessities to do so. It is my hope that you, too, will vote to pass each of these bills. Thank you.

2025 Legislative Package on Housing

- **Building code:** [2025-H 5804](#), sponsored by Speaker Shekarchi would build upon legislation introduced in last year's housing package ([2024-H 7983B](#), [2024-S 2990A](#)), which codified the structure of the State Building Code Office and clarified the role of the State Building Code Commissioner. This legislation would provide additional clarity and centralize roles and quorums in order to further streamline the process and centralize the duties of the state officials, employees, commissions, and boards related to building and fire codes and permitting.
The elimination of zoning, permitting, and insurance obstacles to the construction of transitional shelters and affordable housing.

- Expansion of electronic permitting:** 2025-H 5803, sponsored by Speaker Shekarchi would build upon legislation introduced in last year's housing package (H-2024 7978A, 2024-S 3036A) to expand the use of electronic permitting for building permits, which is mandated for planning and zoning applications by October of this year. This legislation requires that applications for the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, and the Rhode Island Department of Transportation utilize the e-permitting system by October 2026.

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- Technical amendments to Zoning Enabling Act and Subdivision Act:** 2025-H 5794, sponsored by House Judiciary Committee Chairman Robert E. Craven (D-Dist. 32, North Kingstown) is based on feedback received from the Land Use Commission and various stakeholders, including local cities and towns, developers, advocates, planners and developers. The legislation seeks to clarify the processes set forth in the Zoning Enabling Act and Subdivision Act and to correct issues that are creating unnecessary delays and/or red tape. Additionally, Rhode Island's Adaptive Reuse law (2023-H 6090A, 2023-S 1035A) is further clarified to encourage projects to continue to convert underutilized or vacant commercial buildings.

Incentives for contractors and developers for the construction of affordable housing for ownership or rent.

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- Low and Moderate Housing Act amendments:** 2025-H 5801, sponsored by House Commission on Housing Affordability Chairwoman June S. Speakman (D-Dist. 68, Warren, Bristol) furthers the work of the Affordable Housing Commission and implements feedback received by and from the commission. The legislation builds upon substantial amendments made to Rhode Island's Low and Moderate Housing Act via legislation sponsored by Chair Speakman (2022-H 7949Aaa, 2022-S 3046A) in 2022. This legislation further clarifies standards and findings required for development to remove subjectivity in the process.

Incentives for contractors and developers for the construction of affordable housing for ownership or rent.
- Development of state-owned vacant properties for housing:** 2025-H 5802, sponsored by Rep. Thomas E. Noret (D-Dist. 25, Coventry, West Warwick) would leverage data collected by the Commission to Study the Cost and Status of State-Owned Vacant Properties, which was established via a resolution (H-2022 7320Aaa) he sponsored to review state-owned vacant and/or abandoned properties that may be utilized for housing opportunities throughout the state. This legislation establishes a streamlined approval process to be used for such properties.

Provide incentives to owners of multi-unit properties to rent out vacant units via appropriate local, state and federal voucher programs.
- Temporary exemptions from the tax levy cap to accommodate new housing:** 2025-H 5793, sponsored by House Labor Committee Chairman Arthur J. Corvese (D-Dist. 55, North Providence) was requested by the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns; it would allow an exemption from the local annual maximum tax levy for new construction of housing under certain conditions. The exemption would be contingent upon approval by the municipality and is only allowed where the new housing includes a portion of affordable units, among other criteria.

Incentives for contractors and developers for the construction of affordable housing for ownership or rent.
- Reliance on zoning certificates:** 2025-H 5795, sponsored by Rep. Tina Spears (D-Dist. 36, Charlestown, New Shoreham, South Kingstown, Westerly) would allow purchasers to reasonably rely on zoning opinions

issued by local officials. Presently, when a current or prospective property owner obtains a zoning certificate, the certificate is for instructive purposes only and not binding; this amendment would remove the non-binding nature of zoning certificates to allow property owners to rely on the municipal determination of the legality of the present use.

The elimination of zoning, permitting, and insurance obstacles to the construction of transitional shelters and affordable housing.

- **Village/mixed-use zoning requirements:** 2025-H 5800, sponsored by Chairman Craven would require municipalities to provide for village or mixed-use zoning to allow residential use in some or all areas of their commercial zoning districts.

The elimination of zoning, permitting, and insurance obstacles to the construction of transitional shelters and affordable housing.

- **Higher density development in areas within the urban services boundary:** 2025-H 5796, sponsored by Rep. Jason Knight (D-Dist. 67, Barrington, Warren) is designed to encourage higher density development in areas within the urban services boundary. The legislation provides that the city or town shall allow residential uses other than solely single-family units in these areas where public water and sewer are available.

The elimination of zoning, permitting, and insurance obstacles to the construction of transitional shelters and affordable housing.

- **Attached single family dwelling units:** 2025-H 5798, sponsored by Chair Speakman is based on feedback from housing advocates and financial institutions regarding the demand for lower-cost home ownership opportunities, such as townhomes. This legislation encourages municipalities to allow such units where the structures share a party wall and a lot line, but are independent lots. The legislation would allow such type of units where zoning already allows the same density in a vertical style, by way of tenement or other two-, three-, or multi-family structures.

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- **Infill/oversized lot subdivisions:** 2025-H 5799, sponsored by Rep. Cherie L. Cruz (D-Dist. 58, Pawtucket) is based on feedback presented to the Land Use Commission to take advantage of underutilized land in a community. It would allow oversized lots to be subdivided if the resulting lots are equal to or greater than the lots in the immediate area. Additionally, the legislation would allow administrative modifications of dimensional requirements based on the average dimensional standard of the surrounding structures.

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- **Co-living housing opportunities:** 2025-H 5797, sponsored by House Small Business Committee Chairwoman Carol Hagan McEntee (D-Dist. 33, South Kingstown, Narragansett) would enable municipalities to allow for the use of co-housing arrangements as energy-efficient, low-cost housing options similar to dorms in which there are common spaces, amenities, and facilities, but residents have separate private bedrooms. This housing model has been adopted by other states as a cost-effective option.

Remedies to control soaring rental costs, especially from corporate landlords.