



Testimony of Matthew Netto, AARP Rhode Island
House Bill 5955
House Municipal Government and Housing Committee
March 20, 2025

Chairman Casey and Members of the House Municipal Government and Housing Committee:

AARP is a nonpartisan, social mission organization with 38 million members nationwide and nearly 125,000 members here in Rhode Island. We advocate on behalf of issues that impact older adults, and we appreciate the opportunity to support House Bill 5955 by Representative Speakman.

H5955 would create a land bank so that the Department of Housing can assemble unutilized publicly owned land to develop housing. Land is one of the most expensive factors in real estate development. All available publicly owned land should be consolidated into a land bank so that the homes that Rhode Islanders need can be built.

This legislation would require state agencies and municipalities to provide the Department of Housing a list of real estate assets that are not in use and to share their plans, if any, for developing those assets. It would also require the Department Of Housing to assess all publicly-owned land to determine its viability to be developed for housing. The AARP long-term supports and services scorecard ranks the state of Rhode Island as dead as in the country for the availability of housing for older adults. Older adults overwhelmingly want to remain in their communities. Municipalities utilizing existing space to create housing will provide older adults with more options for remaining in their community as they age.

H5955 would also give the Department of Housing the powers and capacities to acquire already-existing affordable housing to ensure its preservation. Too much of the state's naturally-occurring affordable housing—housing that is relatively affordable but unsubsidized by any government program—is in deplorable condition. It's critical that the Department of Housing acquire such properties to preserve them as safe and permanently affordable housing owned by either the state, public housing authorities, or non-profits. Thank you for your consideration and we urge you to recommend passage on HB 5955

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Matt Netto". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Matt Netto, AARP RI, Associate State Director of Advocacy
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