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Representative Stephen Casey
Chair, House Municipal Government & Housing Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Representative Casey and Members of the House Municipal Government & Housing Committee,

I'm writing as a Scituate resident to urge your support for House Bill No. 5689, "AN ACT RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES -- LOW AND MODERATE INCOME HOUSING" (LC1296/1), introduced on February 26, 2025, by Representatives Fellela, Fascia, Perez, Quattrocchi, Nardone, Santucci, and Chippendale. This bill offers a vital lifeline to small towns like ours—10,581 strong and fiercely proud of our rural character—facing unrelenting pressure from the Low and Moderate Income Housing Act (LMIHA). Its provisions, defining "multi-family housing" as over 60 units in towns under 35,000 and mandating a pre-approval conference with local boards, strike a fair balance: addressing Rhode Island's housing needs while protecting the quiet, wildlife-rich life we cherish.

Scituate's rural soul—195 people per square mile, 3-acre lots in our RR zones, and the Scituate Reservoir buffering 70% of our land—is under siege. With only 1.94% low- and moderate-income (LMI) housing (84 of 4,400 units, far from the 10% goal of 440), developers can override our zoning with comprehensive permits, proposing 200-unit projects that cram 500 new residents into 20 acres or less. For me, 100 new neighbors—about 40-50 units—is the breaking point. That's when the deer stop rustling, the owls fall silent, and the hum of cars (50-60 decibels) drowns out the crickets I hear at dusk. A single 200-unit development, at 10-20 units per acre, would erase 50% of nearby wildlife (per URI's 2020 ecology data) and turn my half-mile radius into a suburban echo—70 decibels of traffic noise, not rural peace.

H 5689 steps in where we need it. By defining "multi-family" as over 60 units in towns like Scituate (well under 35,000), it draws a line—projects up to 60 units (150 people) stay manageable, while 61+ trigger scrutiny. The pre-approval conference gives our Zoning Board a chance to push back early—raising the reservoir's role (supplying 60% of RI's water) or Route 102's limits (5,000 trips/day can't take 100 more). A 100-unit proposal (250 people) might shrink to 60, keeping density creep at bay—30% wildlife

loss instead of 50%, noise at 60 decibels instead of 70. It's not a full shield, but it's a brake on the state's override hammer.

We're not shirking housing responsibility. I'd back a \$3 million town investment—\$50-\$75 per household—to build 50 LMI units (125 people) on 5 acres, like the old Route 116 landfill, at 10 units per acre. It's over my 100-neighbor line, but controlled—LMI jumps to 134 (3%), and rural bends, not breaks, if a mile from my woods. H 5689 complements this: at 50 units, it's not "multi-family," skipping extra hoops, but it guards against a 200-unit bomb (500 people) that could follow if the state ignores our effort.

Without this bill, that \$3 million's a speed bump—Speaker Shekarchi's 2025 density push (12 bills, 20 units/acre nods) could still flood us with 500-1,500 new residents, turning North Scituate into Cranston's edge (2,800/square mile).

This bill's rural roots—backed by Rep. Quattrocchi, my voice in Scituate—reflect a cry from towns like ours, Johnston, and Coventry, where overrides threaten what makes us home. It's not anti-housing; it's pro-balance. Rhode Island needs 24,000 units, but not at the cost of every small town's soul—only 6 hit 10% LMI in 2021. H 5689 slows the creep, letting us build smart (50 units, not 200) and keep wildlife noise over traffic roar. I urge you to move it forward—hearings in May 2025 could lock in this chance. Scituate's rural life, and our quiet nights, hang in the balance.

Sincerely,

Gary and Kim Bouchard
Concerned Rhode Islanders