



March 17, 2026

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey, Chair
House Municipal Government & Housing Committee
Rhode Island Statehouse
Providence, 02903

RE: Testimony In Support of House Bill 8021 RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- STATE BUILDING CODE -- RHODE ISLAND INCLUSIVE HOME DESIGN ACT

Chairman Casey, Vice Chair, and Members of the House Municipal Government & Housing Committee:

On behalf of **United Way of Rhode Island**, I respectfully submit testimony regarding the proposed **Rhode Island Inclusive Home Design Act**, which would require new residential construction to comply with **Type C (Visitable) design standards under the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Standards for Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities (ANSI A117.1-2017)**.

United Way of Rhode Island works closely with families across the state through our **211/ADRC services, housing stability programs, and research on ALICE households (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed)**. Nearly **four in ten Rhode Island households fall within the ALICE population**, meaning these families earn above the federal poverty level but still struggle to afford the basic costs of housing, childcare, food, transportation, and healthcare. Housing stability is one of the most significant factors affecting these families' economic security.

United Way strongly supports policies that ensure Rhode Island's housing stock is **safe, inclusive, and adaptable to the needs of residents over time**. The concept of **visitable housing**—homes designed with basic accessibility features such as a no-step entrance, wider doorways, and a usable main-floor bathroom—helps ensure that people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals recovering from illness or injury can enter and use a home safely.

Designing homes with these features from the outset is significantly more cost-effective than retrofitting homes later. For ALICE households, who often lack the financial resources to make accessibility modifications, these design considerations can mean the difference between remaining safely in their homes or facing costly relocation or institutional care. Inclusive housing design also supports Rhode Island's aging population and helps families care for older relatives in multigenerational households.

At the same time, United Way recognizes that this legislation applies broadly to **single-family homes, townhouses, and multifamily housing**, which may raise implementation considerations

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for builders, municipalities, and housing developers. Rhode Island continues to face a significant housing shortage, and it is important that policies intended to improve housing accessibility are implemented in ways that support both **housing supply and housing quality**.

For these reasons, United Way respectfully encourages the Committee to consider several potential amendments that could strengthen the legislation while ensuring practical implementation.

First, the General Assembly may wish to consider **allowing limited waivers where compliance is technically infeasible due to site conditions such as steep topography or structural constraints**, similar to waiver provisions used in other accessibility-related housing policies. This would ensure flexibility in circumstances where full compliance is not physically possible.

Second, the legislation could benefit from **clear implementation guidance from the State Building Code Standards Committee** to help builders, inspectors, and municipalities apply the visitability standards consistently.

Third, the General Assembly may wish to consider **phased implementation or targeted timelines** to allow the residential construction industry time to adjust to the new requirements while continuing to advance the important goals of inclusive design.

Finally, because the legislation requires future updates to ANSI standards to apply automatically upon adoption by the building code standards committee, the state may wish to ensure that **significant future changes are accompanied by appropriate review and guidance** to support smooth implementation.

United Way of Rhode Island believes that housing policy should support both **accessibility and affordability**, ensuring that homes can meet the needs of residents across all stages of life. Inclusive home design represents an important step toward building communities where older adults, people with disabilities, and families can remain connected to their neighborhoods and support networks.

We appreciate the leadership of the sponsors in advancing this important conversation and look forward to working with the General Assembly and our community partners to strengthen Rhode Island's housing system.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,



Kyle Bennett
Chief Policy and Impact Officer
United Way of Rhode Island

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50 Valley Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02909 | (401) 444-0600 | unitedwayri.org