



TO: Chair Casey and Members, House Municipal Government and Housing Committee
FROM: Carol Anne Costa, SACRI Executive Director
Maureen Maigret, SACRI Policy Advisor
RE: H8021, RI Inclusive Home Design by Rep. Stewart

The mission of the Senior Agenda Coalition (SACRI) is to mobilize people to achieve power in order to implement an agenda that improves the quality of life of older Rhode Islanders. As housing is an important priority issue for our older population and older adults with disabilities, we are pleased to offer comments on H8021 whose purpose is to increase our state's supply of accessible housing options for persons of all ages.

SACRI applauds the tremendous effort so many members of the legislature are making to find solutions to the housing crisis impacting all our families including our older householders. We also note recent efforts made by RI Housing to explore ways to provide accessibility features in developments they help fund.

Persons age 65 and over comprise one out of five persons in RI and their numbers are growing. Our state has an extremely old housing stock much of which lacks accessibility features needed by persons with ambulatory/mobility difficulties. Census data shows 19 percent of RIsers age 65+ with a self-reported ambulatory difficulty making them more prone to falls in housing with outside stairs for access, stairs inside multi-level homes and outdated bathrooms. As the older population grows, the number with ambulatory difficulties needing walkers and wheelchairs will increase along with the need for more accessible housing.

Many older households wish to relocate to smaller homes or move to rental units with accessibility features needed now or to prepare to "age in place" but finding accessible and affordable homes/apartments is a major challenge. There are huge wait lists for subsidized housing units especially for those with accessible features. Information reviewed from RI Housing on housing units funded in the last five years found only 8% were accessible units. As the state continues to invest millions of dollars to develop affordable housing for low and moderate-income persons it is critical to address the need for accessible housing for older adults and persons with disabilities.

H8021 and other bills intended to increase construction of accessible housing are under consideration. We urge you to consider the provisions in each of these bills, to work with the sponsors, RI Housing, the Executive Housing Office and relevant organizations to pass a bill in 2026 that allows the state to move forward to expand accessible housing options. As building housing takes time, waiting will only increase costs in the long run.