



March 30, 2026

The Honorable Representative Stephen Casey, Chair  
House Municipal Government and Housing Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
Providence RI 02903

**RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 7374  
AN ACT RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES – ZONING ORDINANCES**

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

On behalf of United Way Rhode Island, we strongly support H 7374, which amends the zoning ordinances to allow the town to restrict occupancy to one unrelated person per bedroom in a dwelling, up to a five-bedroom unit. Units with more than five bedrooms may be limited to five unrelated persons per unit. United Way's policy and advocacy efforts follow our strategic framework: **Strong Families, Strong Nonprofits, Strong United Way**. We prioritize policies that strengthen household stability, expand access to opportunity, and ensure public investments deliver measurable value.

Housing stability is central to United Way Rhode Island's Strong Families principle. Education outcomes, economic opportunity, and health determinants are compromised by housing instability, which perpetuates a cycle of poverty that can impact a family for generations. Housing support is the most frequent need presented by Rhode Islanders calling or visiting 211, United Way Rhode Island's human services helpline. In 2025, 17,235 Rhode Islanders called for housing help, making up 35% of that year's calls, and so far in 2026, 38% of the callers have expressed housing needs. Rhode Island's investments into housing preservation and production are starting to turn the tide, but Rhode Islanders need affordable housing now.

The definitions clarified in this bill effectively support an affordable option for lower-cost housing for unrelated people. Where the municipality can set the ceiling based on neighborhood characteristics, the state sets the floor based on the actual capacity of a residential building to safely house more people. More people in a rental unit means lower rent cost per person, which is especially valuable for Rhode Islanders on a fixed income.

United Way Rhode Island respectfully urges your support for House Bill 7374 and thanks you for sharing our commitment to building code that helps affordably house **Strong Families**.

Sincerely,

Peggy Afonso, Program Officer, Housing and Economic Policy  
United Way Rhode Island