



March 31, 2026

The Honorable Stephen Casey
Chair, House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence RI 02903

RE: Support with Comments on H7445

Dear Chairman Casey and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Housing Network of Rhode Island, thank you for the opportunity to offer our conceptual support on **H7445**, legislation that authorizes faith-based organizations to develop affordable housing as a by-right use on land they hold and establishes a ministerial review process to help expedite development.

The effort to leverage community-based partners, including faith-based organizations, reflects a thoughtful recognition that trusted, local institutions can play an important role in helping to unlock additional development opportunities that wouldn't otherwise be available.

At the same time, I would like to respectfully raise several considerations regarding implementation.

First, the capacity of faith-based organizations to execute the responsibilities contemplated under this bill may vary significantly. While many organizations have deep community ties, not all have the administrative infrastructure, staffing, or compliance systems necessary to manage public resources, track eligibility, and meet reporting requirements. Without additional support—such as technical assistance, standardized processes, and potentially dedicated funding for administration—there is a risk of uneven program delivery across communities.

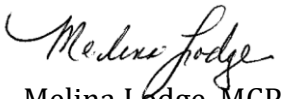
Relatedly, to the extent the bill envisions or enables a role for faith-based organizations as housing developers, this raises additional practical considerations. Housing development is a highly specialized field that requires expertise in financing, zoning, permitting, construction management, and long-term property operations. Many faith-based organizations may not have prior experience in these areas, which could introduce project delivery risks, delays, or cost overruns if not carefully structured. Clarifying whether partnerships with experienced developers are required—or establishing minimum capacity standards—could help mitigate these risks.

Second, the bill would benefit from clearer articulation of monitoring and compliance safeguards, particularly as they relate to ensuring that assistance is directed to eligible households. As currently structured, it is not fully evident how eligibility determinations will be verified, how consistency will be maintained across participating organizations, or what oversight mechanisms will be in place to prevent errors, duplication, or misalignment of funds.

To strengthen the proposal, the Committee may wish to consider: (1) Establishing clear, uniform eligibility verification standards; (2) Requiring consistent documentation and reporting across all participating organizations; (3) Providing centralized oversight or audit mechanisms; (4) Offering training and capacity-building resources for participating faith-based entities; (5) Clarifying accountability structures in the event of noncompliance; (6) Defining minimum qualifications or partnership requirements for any entity acting in a housing development capacity under this proposed legislation.

We look forward to working with the bill's sponsor and the faith-based community to that the laudable goals of **H7445** are realized effectively, equitably, and with appropriate stewardship of public resources. I am available to answer any questions you might have and can be reached at 401-721-5680 ext. 104 or mlodge@housingnetworkri.org.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melina Lodge".

Melina Lodge, MCP
Executive Director