

March 31, 2026

Re: House Bill 8036

Dear Committee Members

I am the President of the Cranston City Plan Commission, and I am writing to express my opposition to House Bill 8036. This legislation appears to require municipalities to allow for single room occupancies (SROs) in all residential zones including single-family home zones. The legislation overrides local zoning, building codes, and housing codes, is impractical, and will negatively impact homeowners.

First, this legislation overrides local control over zoning. Land use decisions should be made at a local level because local officials, not state officials, are in the best position to know the unique qualities of the land and neighborhoods in their municipalities.

Second, this legislation overrides the state building code, minimum housing standards, and expressly prohibits the imposition of a specific ratio of sleeping units to kitchens or bathrooms in SROs. SROs allow tenants to have their own bedroom but share a bathroom and kitchen. They are somewhat similar to boarding houses, which are currently required by state law to having no more than six persons per bathroom. SROs were prevalent in dense urban centers generations ago, and were sometimes associated with blight and slums. After the Second World War, minimum housing standards were adopted. These standards were adopted, in part, to address problems caused by SROs such as overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and public health hazards. SROs can make sense at certain locations, and in some situations, but only with certain minimal standards so as to avoid overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and public health hazards. We should not try to increase the supply of housing by lowering our housing standards.

Third, this legislation is impractical. It requires that SROs be allowed in all residential areas including areas which are not served by mass transit. SROs would likely be used by individuals who do not own an automobile. Having SROs in areas not served by RIPTA serves no purpose.

Lastly, SROs in single-family neighborhoods would negatively impact the property values of homeowners. A major reason zoning was adopted a century ago was to protect the value of property investments, in particular single-family homes. Relying upon single-family zoning, many Rhode Islanders have invested a large amount of their life savings in their homes. In fact, the equity in a single-family home may constitute most of a person's net worth. There are studies which have shown that rental properties can have a negative impact on the value of nearby single-family homes. Therefore, SROs should not be allowed in single-family neighborhoods. We should be trying to increase the supply of housing without negatively impacting those who have invested in their home.

Steve Frias

President
Cranston City Plan Commission