

**TO:** Members of the House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing

**FROM:** Felicity Maxwell, Executive Director, Texans for Housing

**DATE:** March 30, 2026

**RE:** Testimony in Support H 8036

Distinguished Chair and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of H 8036. I am writing to strongly urge the House Municipal Government & Housing Committee to support legislation that re-legalizes and incentivizes Single-Room Occupancy (SRO) and co-living housing models across Rhode Island.

Rhode Island is facing a housing deficit of almost 25,000 homes, a crisis that cannot be resolved solely by continuing to build single-family homes or even extensive multi-family apartments. Only by diversifying the state's "housing menu" to include deeply affordable, flexible, and communal options can true progress be made on addressing this shortage.

For decades, SROs provided a vital safety net for transition shelter, to low-income workers, students, and seniors.

First, re-legalizing SROs would allow state non-profits like Crossroads RI and Amos House to scale their "Housing First" initiatives more rapidly. It provides a dignified alternative to congregate sheltering, which often lacks the privacy necessary for long-term stability. Many individuals currently in state-funded shelters do not need a full one-bedroom apartment; they simply need a safe, private, lockable room with access to utilities.

Second, research shows that co-living allows young professionals and recent graduates to live near transit and job centers without being "rent-burdened" (paying more than 30% of their income on housing). And for the aging population of Rhode Island, co-living provides a welcome middle ground between living alone in a large house and moving into an expensive assisted living facility or nursing home.

Third, Rhode Island is rich in underutilized historic mills, office buildings, and vacant commercial spaces.

Traditional apartment conversions require complex plumbing for every unit. SRO and co-living models allow for "wet walls" and shared facilities, making the conversion of older buildings significantly more cost-effective. These models increase density in urban cores, utilizing existing infrastructure and reducing the environmental impact of suburban sprawl. By sharing costs for kitchens and common areas, developers can offer rents that are 30% to 50% lower than market-rate studios.

Finally, opponents often cite the "tenement" conditions of the early 20th century as a reason to ban SROs. However, modern building and fire codes (NFPA 101) have evolved. Today's co-living spaces are high-quality, professionally managed environments that provide social connection and modern amenities while remaining strictly regulated for health and safety.

We cannot solve a 21st-century housing crisis with mid-20th-century zoning. By re-legalizing SROs and co-living, Rhode Island can provide a pathway to stability for its most vulnerable residents while fostering a vibrant, inclusive economy for its workforce. And we in Texas, and in states across the nation, will be glad to once again follow Rhode Island's strong leadership on housing reforms - setting the agenda for how to address the deepening affordability crisis seen in so many of our communities .

I respectfully request that you move this legislation forward with a favorable recommendation.