



Testimony of Matthew Netto, AARP Rhode Island
In support of House Bill 8036
House Municipal Government & Housing Committee
March 31st, 2026

Chairmen Casey and members of the House Municipal Government & Housing Committee:

AARP is a nonpartisan, social mission organization with 38 million members nationwide and nearly 125,000 members here in Rhode Island. We advocate on behalf of issues that impact older adults, and we appreciate the opportunity to offer our support for expanding access to inherently affordable housing by re-legalizing co-living/single-room occupancy (SRO) and shared dwelling models of many types as Representative Speakman's House Bill 8036 does.

Rhode Island is facing a severe housing affordability and availability crisis, and older adults are among those most affected. Many older residents live on fixed or limited incomes and are struggling with rising rents, property taxes, insurance costs, and utility expenses. As housing costs increase, too many older adults are forced to make difficult choices or leave communities where they have lived for decades. Expanding a wider range of lower-cost housing options is essential to ensuring older Rhode Islanders can remain housed safely and with dignity.

The ROOM Act helps increase overall housing supply and eases pressure on larger units by allowing smaller, lower-cost homes to meet demand. As the bill's legislative findings note, adding smaller units supports the housing "filtering" process, which can help stabilize rents across the broader housing market. This is critical for older adults who wish to age in place but are facing increasing competition for limited housing options.

AARP Rhode Island also supports this legislation because it removes outdated zoning and occupancy restrictions that have unnecessarily limited housing choice. By requiring municipalities to allow co-living rights in residential, commercial, and mixed-use zones, where residential is permitted, H8036 ensures that communities cannot exclude affordable housing options through discriminatory or overly restrictive local regulations. These protections are especially important for older adults, who may otherwise face barriers based on income, household size, or non-traditional living arrangements.

In addition, by facilitating the adaptive reuse of underutilized office buildings, hotels, and other commercial properties, H8036 supports smart growth and walkable communities near transit, services, and amenities. These locations are particularly beneficial for older adults who may no longer drive and depend on proximity to healthcare, shopping, and public transportation

We urge you to support House Bill 8036 because it expands access to affordable housing, increases overall housing supply, and reduces pressure on larger family-sized units by restoring co-living and single-room occupancy options. H8036 provides flexible, lower-cost housing choices that can help older adults age in place, reduce housing cost burdens, and access community-based living



arrangements that promote independence and social connection while addressing Rhode Island's ongoing housing affordability crisis. We urge you to recommend passage on House Bill 8036.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt R Netto".

Matthew Netto
Associate State Director-AARP Rhode Island