



March 31, 2026

Hon. Stephen M. Casey  
Chair  
House Municipal Government and Housing Committee  
[HouseMunicipalGovernmentandHousing@rilegislature.gov](mailto:HouseMunicipalGovernmentandHousing@rilegislature.gov)  
State House  
Providence, RI 02903

Re: **Support of House Bill 8142 – An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government – Residential Reuse Incentive Act**

Dear Chair Casey,

BuildRI is a domestic non-profit trade association comprised of four (4) contractor associations (the Labor Relations Division of the RI Chapter of the Associated General Contractors, the New England Mechanical Contractors' Ass'n, the RI Mason Contractors' Ass'n, and the RI and Southeast MA Chapter of the National Electrical Contractors' Ass'n), and seventeen (17) Local Trade Unions comprised of approximately 10,000 local tradesmen and women. On behalf of BuildRI, and our partners, we are in strong support for House Bill 8147, which establishes a residential reuse incentive program to encourage the conversion of underutilized commercial properties into much-needed housing.

The General Assembly have taken notable steps to address Rhode Island's housing crisis. From easing zoning and permitting requirements to committing hundreds of millions of dollars to spur development. However, we have yet to see the housing stock needed produced. The housing market only produced approximately 900 new units in FY2025; a far cry from the thousands needed annually to meet our goal of 15,000 new units by 2030.

According to HousingWorks RI's annual report, renters earning the state's median income cannot afford market-rate housing in any city or town. The average home price has reached \$485,345, requiring an annual household income of roughly \$150,000 to afford a monthly mortgage. Yet the average household income in Rhode Island, as reported by WPRI in February 2025, is approximately \$85,000. This gap makes clear that the current housing market is failing working families.

While increasing housing supply is necessary, it is not sufficient. Housing has become unaffordable not only because of limited supply, but also because wages have failed to keep pace with rising costs. Too often, housing development is pursued in ways that undercut the very workers responsible for building it. Rhode Island cannot solve its housing crisis at the expenses of the skill men and women of the construction industry.

Rhode Island's housing shortage is one of the most pressing challenges facing our state. Expanding our housing supply is essential not only to meet current demand, but also to sustain and grow our workforce. Without meaningful action, we risk constraining economic growth and limiting opportunities for residents across our communities.

HB 8147 represents a thoughtful, practical, and cost-effective solution. By incentivizing the conversion of existing commercial properties into residential units, this legislation leverages existing infrastructure and reimagines underutilized buildings; while ensuring workers are paid a family supporting wage, with benefits.

This legislation pairs development incentives with strong labor standards that ensure projects are completed safely, skillfully, and fairly. Requiring projects with construction costs over \$25 million to comply with prevailing wage standards ensures that tradesmen and tradeswomen are compensated with wages and benefits that allow them to support their families, access healthcare, and build retirement security.

Additionally, the requirement that at least 10% of all work hours be performed by apprentices is a critical investment in Rhode Island's future workforce. These apprenticeship opportunities open pathways to stable, middle-class careers for many residents, creating lasting economic mobility and strengthening our communities. At the same time, they help address a growing workforce challenge: the average age of construction trades workers is currently between 55 and 57. Without a strong pipeline of new workers, Rhode Island will struggle to meet future construction and infrastructure needs.

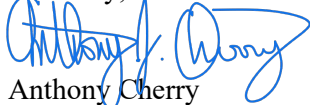
Rhode Island would not be alone in pursuing this type of policy. States such as Connecticut, Massachusetts, Nevada, and New York have already implemented similar incentive programs. Connecticut recently codified a comparable initiative in November 2025 and is already evaluating multiple projects. Massachusetts has successfully advanced several developments under similar frameworks. These examples demonstrate that this approach is both viable and effective.

Rhode Island must embrace new strategies to address our housing crisis. The status quo is not working, and bold, innovative solutions like HB 8147 are necessary to attract development and deliver real results.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support House Bill 8147. This legislation is a smart investment in our housing supply, our workforce, and the long-term economic health of our state.

Thank you for your attention to this correspondence. Please contact the undersigned if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Anthony Cherry  
Assistant Executive Director