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Rhode Island Works Best When We Say **UNION YES.**

March 31, 2026

Chairman Stephen M. Casey
House Municipal Government and Housing Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Testimony in Support of HB8142, An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government – Residential Reuse Incentive Act

Dear Chairman Casey and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Rhode Island AFL-CIO, which represents over 80,000 working people across the state, I write in support of House Bill 8142 introduced by Representative June Speakman, establishing a “conversion incentive” to expand housing opportunities across Rhode Island.

We are facing a severe housing shortage that is driving up costs and making it increasingly difficult for Rhode Islanders to afford to live in the communities where they work. Our state builds fewer homes per capita than any other state across the country, and this lack of supply has led to rising rents and increased home prices. House Bill 8142 offers a solution by encouraging the conversion of existing structures, particularly vacant commercial space.

The practice of conversion incentive development is widely recognized as a cost-effective way to add housing supply without requiring large-scale new development or significant new infrastructure. It helps unlock housing in areas that are already served by public infrastructure, including transit, utilities, and local businesses. This approach creates more opportunities for workers to live closer to their jobs. It also revitalizes underused properties and commercial areas, helping communities grow sustainably and creating high-quality construction jobs in the process.

Increasing the state’s housing supply is essential to maintaining and growing Rhode Island’s workforce. Employers across sectors are struggling to attract and retain workers due in part to the high cost of housing and the increasing cost of living. By expanding the availability of homes, particularly more affordable units, this legislation will help ensure that working people can remain in the state and contribute to their local economy.

Additionally, conversion projects can generate good union jobs in the construction industry, while also supporting long-term economic stability in our communities. By including labor standards on projects derived from this program, it levels the playing field for responsible contractors who will not cut corners at the expense of workers. These standards help uplift communities and establish a sustainable pathway to the middle class.

House Bill 8142 represents a smart investment in Rhode Island's existing infrastructure, while addressing its housing crisis and creating good jobs along the way. For these reasons, the Rhode Island AFL-CIO respectfully urges your support of House Bill 8142.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Erica A. Hammond', is written in a cursive style.

Erica A. Hammond
Legislative Director, Rhode Island AFL-CIO