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Rhode Island House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Support for H7446 – Low and Moderate Income Housing

Dear Chairman Casey and Members of the Committee:

We respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of H7446.

I am a volunteer and co-lease holder at Faith Hill Farm in East Greenwich. My son, Alexander Meletis, is an employee, rider, and lease holder there. Our involvement is direct and ongoing. We are on the land regularly and rely on the stability of the environment, including groundwater, for daily operations, animal care, and safety.

While we are not residents of East Greenwich, our regular presence and work at Faith Hill Farm give us direct, ongoing exposure to the land, water systems, and environmental conditions at issue.

Through this work, we are part of Rhode Island's working agricultural and equestrian ecosystem, where land use decisions and water quality are not abstract concerns, but conditions that directly determine whether operations can continue.

We support the need for more housing in Rhode Island. However, how that housing is developed matters.

The current Low and Moderate Income Housing Act allows density bonuses that can reach up to eight units per acre. In practical terms, this represents a dramatic increase from traditional zoning patterns and introduces significant pressure on groundwater-dependent areas.

In areas that rely on wells and environmentally sensitive land, increased density leads to increased septic loading, greater nitrogen discharge, and expanded runoff. These are well-documented pathways to groundwater degradation. Once water quality is compromised, it is difficult, and often not economically feasible, to restore.

The Scituate Reservoir Watershed Management Plan and related state guidance have already identified high-density residential development as a significant risk factor for degradation of drinking water quality across Rhode Island.

Rhode Island's drinking water resources are finite and regionally interconnected. Once groundwater is contaminated or overdrawn, the impacts extend beyond individual developments to surrounding properties, farms, and communities, affecting private wells, agricultural operations, and local ecosystems, and can result in long-term or irreversible loss of usable drinking water with no practical or immediate means of restoration.

At Faith Hill Farm, which relies on a well for animal water, that would not be a marginal disruption. It would directly impair daily operations, animal health, and the continued viability of the farm.

The risks associated with overdevelopment in groundwater-dependent areas are not speculative. They are foreseeable.

Courts have long recognized that development may be limited based on infrastructure capacity and environmental protection. In *Golden v. Planning Board of the Town of Ramapo*, 30 N.Y.2d 359 (1972), development was tied to the availability of essential services, including water. In *Just v. Marinette County*, 56 Wis. 2d 7 (1972), the court affirmed the authority to prevent environmental harm before it occurs.

H7446 addresses a critical gap in the current law by requiring that the capacity of water and sewer systems be documented before increased density is approved. This is a reasonable and necessary safeguard.

Rhode Island's drinking water resources are limited. Once they are compromised, the impacts extend beyond individual developments to surrounding properties, farms, and communities.

This bill does not prevent housing development. It ensures that development is responsible and sustainable.

We respectfully urge the Committee to adopt H7446.

Sincerely,

Robyn Meletis
Volunteer and Co-Lease Holder, Faith Hill Farm, East Greenwich

Alexander Meletis
Employee, Rider, and Lease Holder, Faith Hill Farm, East Greenwich