

April 2, 2026

Re: Senate Bill 2265

Dear Committee Members

I am the President of the Cranston City Plan Commission, and I am writing to express my opposition to Senate Bill 2265. This legislation appears to impose uniform lot sizes for the entire state, and which are smaller than currently allowed the zoning of municipalities. This legislation would override local zoning, imposes a one-size fits all approach on the entire state, requires problematic smaller lot sizes, and will have a significant negative impact on homeowners.

First, this legislation overrides local control over zoning. Land use decisions should be made at a local level because local officials, not state officials, are in the best position to know the unique qualities of the land and neighborhoods in their municipalities.

Second, this legislation imposes a one-size fits all approach on the entire state. This legislation allows for only three types of minimum residential lot sizes: 2,500 square feet (urban), 5,000 sq. feet (dense suburban), and one acre (barely rural). Many in Rhode Island, specifically in Cranston, have chosen to and want to live in neighborhoods that have lot sizes which are larger than what is allowed by legislation. Their choices should be honored, rather than prohibited. Not all municipalities or neighborhoods are alike, nor should we want them to become all alike. Rhode Island is a state where people can choose to live in urban, suburban, or rural communities, where they can live in a high-density area or low-density neighborhood. We should preserve this diversity rather than seek to urbanize more of Rhode Island or to make all neighborhoods denser.

Third, this legislation requires smaller lot sizes that will result in various problems, which arise from higher density. For example, the legislation limits lot sizes to 2,500 square feet if the lot is located with a quarter mile of transit stop. A lot this small would have problems having adequate off-street parking, and not much pervious surface to absorb rainwater. Just because someone lives close to bus stop does not mean they don't want to own a car. Anthony Downs, a housing and transportation scholar, noted that: "Nearly every American wants to be able to leap into his or her car, van or truck, and zoom off ... to wherever he or she wants to go, in total privacy and great comfort." Furthermore, RIPTA is not a robust public transit system. It is not a public transit system that is geared towards commuters. Also, Kennedy Plaza, RIPTA's main terminal, is repeatedly exposed to crime. (My comments are based on first-hand experience as someone who periodically uses RIPTA).

Municipalities have minimum lot sizes of more than 5,000 square feet because of the problems that arise from higher density. In 1966, Cranston amended its zoning to establish minimum residential lot sizes of at least 6,000 square feet in order "to prevent overcrowding of land." i.e. high density. As explained in Cranston's first comprehensive plan in 1961: "it should be recognized that increasing density carries with it special problems that must be coped with. With more people living in an area, there are correspondingly greater needs for such facilities as libraries, schools, playgrounds and parking space ... The problems of increasing density may be particularly difficult in areas where existing development is on small lots, allowing little room for

increasing parking and community facilities, and aggravating shortages of yard space.” Smaller lots mean more density. More density means more traffic, less parking space, more storm water runoff, and higher costs for municipalities.

Fourth, this legislation will have a significant negative impact on homeowners. Relying upon zoning, many Rhode Islanders have invested a large amount of their life savings in their homes. As noted by land use scholar William Fischel, changing neighborhood conditions could affect the value of one’s home and “can put your life savings in a tailspin.” In Cranston, new housing construction can be allowed on lots which are smaller than that required by zoning when the proposed housing is consistent with the existing density of neighborhood. However, allowing new housing to be built on lots which are significantly smaller than most of the other lots in a neighborhood could jeopardize the property values of homeowners in that neighborhood. We should be trying to increase the supply of housing without negatively impacting those who have invested in their home.

Steve Frias

President

Cranston City Plan Commission