

April 2, 2026

Re: Senate Bill 2272

Dear Committee Members

I am the President of the Cranston City Plan Commission, and I am writing to express my opposition to Senate Bill 2272. This legislation, in an effort to promote middle housing, appears to prohibit single-family zoning in any municipality with a population of 40,000 or more such as Cranston, and Warwick. This legislation would override local zoning, is unnecessarily broad, is contrary to an original purpose of zoning to promote home construction and homeownership, 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 is unnecessarily broad. Cranston already has zoning districts, which allow for middle housing. In recent years, Cranston has approved middle housing proposals, and have rezoned an area to allow for middle type housing. There is no need to completely prohibit single-family zoning in order to have more middle housing.

Third, this legislation is contrary to an original purpose of zoning, which was to encourage home construction and home ownership. A major reason zoning was adopted a century ago was to protect the value of property investments. Specifically, as noted by William Fischel, a land use scholar, the “protection of single family-family homes was paramount from the outset” of zoning. For instance, in 1920, the Providence City Planning Commission published a report, which stated that “a zoning plan will stabilize and protect property values and investments.” In *Providence Journal* editorials, zoning was championed because it provided “protection of real estate values” and “gives the owner of a home a guarantee of security.” In 1923, Providence adopted a zoning plan with Providence’s city planning engineer justifying its need by noting that “instability of residence districts makes an investment in a home a hazardous venture” and the lack of a zoning plan was “a real handicap to homebuilding and home ownership.” A few months later, in 1924, Cranston adopted its zoning plan based on an expert report which stated that zoning was needed to achieve Cranston’s “chief purpose” which was to be “a residential suburb” where “home ownership” is “promoted” and “home neighborhoods” are “protected and investments in homes safeguarded.” Specifically, the expert’s report stated that “dwelling house districts” needed to be “protected from the encroachment of three-deckers and larger tenements.” It declared that the “single family house is the ideal.” It also explained that “most homeowners in Cranston have gone there to get away from congested conditions.” As noted by local historian Patricia Raub: “People who had grown up in two-and three-decker neighborhoods ... moved to single-family houses in newly developed residential tracts ... in the surrounding towns of Cranston, Warwick, Johnston and Smithfield.” These people saved their money, and went in pursuit of the American Dream, which, as explained by U.S. Supreme Court Justice William Douglas, meant: “A quiet place where yards are wide, people few ... where family values, youth values, and the blessings of quiet seclusion and clean air make the area a sanctuary for people.” With the protection of zoning, a tremendous increase in home building and home ownership occurred in Rhode Island over the next

century. According to the U.S. Census, in 1920, there were 98,861 dwellings in Rhode Island and home ownership was about 31 percent. By 2020, there were 483,474 housing units in Rhode Island and homeownership was about 63 percent. Therefore, prohibiting will single-family zoning will likely undermine home construction and homeownership.

Fourth, this legislation will have a significant negative impact on homeowners. Relying upon single-family zoning, many Rhode Islanders have invested a large amount of their life savings in their homes. According to documentation from the R.I. Department of Revenue, in 2020, the total assessed value of Rhode Island single-family homes was \$85.3 billion. In Cranston, it was \$5.8 billion. In fact, the equity in a single-family home may constitute most of a person's net worth. There are studies which have shown that rental properties can have a negative impact on the value of nearby single-family homes. Therefore, middle housing should not be allowed in single-family neighborhoods. 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