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April 2, 2026

Honorable Chairman Jacob Bissailon  
Senate Housing and Municipal Government Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
Providence, RI 02903

Re: S-2272 – An Act Relating to Towns and Cities – Multifamily Housing Act

Dear Chairman Bissailon and Committee Members:

On behalf of the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA-RI), thank you for the opportunity to raise concerns with S-2272, which would prohibit single-family zoning in municipalities with a population over 40,000, and mandate that those municipalities adopt zoning regulations for middle housing in single-family districts. Based on a review of population data, this bill would affect all of the cities except Newport but could eventually impact growing communities such as Coventry and Cumberland. The bill would be effective upon passage.

As an organization we support the intent of this bill, which is to provide additional, much-needed housing in Rhode Island, but not the means to achieve it. Our concern with this state-wide mandate is two-fold: one is removing local control over land use decisions and the potential unforeseen consequences that may result, and the second is the one size fits all approach to land development.

Residential density is a decision that should be made by the municipality who has the best understanding of where within its community higher density of development is appropriate and feasible. Multi-family development needs to be tied to factors such as the availability of public water and sewer, public transportation and existing land use patterns, particularly those that are culturally and environmentally significant. The definition of “middle housing” is quite broad in that it includes not just duplexes, but triplexes, quadplexes (apartment buildings) and cottage clusters, which can be up to four detached cottages. Not all types of housing are appropriate in all residential zoning districts of a municipality, and those determinations should be made by each municipality.

There have been many efforts in the state to address the housing issue that APA-RI has supported. These include the Statewide Planning Program’s efforts around establishing growth centers; Grow Smart RI’s study of potential transit-oriented development nodes; and legislation in 2023 requiring adaptive reuse of vacant commercial and institutional buildings. We would like to continue to work with all stakeholders to come up with appropriate ways to comprehensively address the critical need for more housing in our state.

Sincerely,

Sean Henry and Gregory Guertin,  
Legislative Committee Co-Chairs

cc RI League of Cities and Towns