



April 7, 2026

The Honorable Jacob Bissaillon
Chair, Senate Committee on Housing and Municipal Government
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence RI 02903

Re: Opposition to S2584, *Act Relating to Towns and Cities – Home-Fit Dwelling Units*

Dear Chair Bissaillon and members of the Committee:

The Housing Network of Rhode Island respectfully writes in strong opposition to **S2584**, legislation which would require that all new construction of “covered dwellings” comply with certain design provisions aimed at enhancing accessibility in residential units.

Over the past five legislative sessions, Rhode Island’s housing crisis has justifiably taken center stage. Historically low inventory, rising demand, and decades of underproduction have driven housing costs out of reach for many residents. Restrictive land use policies, persistently low vacancy rates, chronic underinvestment in affordable housing, and stagnant wages have all contributed to the shortage of homes. These realities underscore the importance of the Speaker’s guiding principle: “Production, production, production.”

We acknowledge and appreciate the bill’s intent. Rhode Island is aging, and more residents are living with disabilities—making it clear that increasing the supply of accessible housing is not optional, but necessary. However, the fundamental issue before us is not *whether* accessible housing is needed, but *how* we equitably and effectively achieve it.

Available data and demographic trends demonstrate that the need for accessible housing spans a wide range of income levels. Seniors aging in place, working families with disabilities, and middle-income households alike require housing that meets accessibility standards. This is not a need confined to extremely low-income households or to the population typically served by nonprofit affordable housing developers.

Yet as currently drafted, **S2584** places a disproportionate burden on the nonprofit development community—organizations that are already operating with constrained financing, complex subsidy layering, and mission-driven affordability requirements. The drafting sponsor’s primary argument is that housing units that receive government subsidy should do more to provide for the needs of Rhode Islanders – and we actually do not disagree. However as drafted, the bill very narrowly defines the subsidies this standard would apply to as the ones utilized by the non-profit development community, leaving much of the for-profit development market—where a significant share of new housing

production occurs—largely unaffected. The Comprehensive Permit process is perhaps the most widely utilized subsidy and produces far more housing units than any direct financial subsidy can and will, and yet it is excluded from this bill.

This imbalance creates a structural mismatch. It targets the sector least able to absorb additional costs and regulatory complexity, while failing to comprehensively address accessibility needs across the full housing market, despite the fact that accessibility demand exists across *all* income brackets.

If the General Assembly’s goal is to meaningfully expand accessible housing opportunities, then policy solutions must be broad-based, balanced, and aligned with where housing production is actually occurring. Limiting requirements primarily to nonprofit-driven development will not produce the scale or diversity of accessible units that Rhode Islanders need.

We are also disappointed that the nonprofit development community was not meaningfully engaged prior to the bill’s introduction, particularly given the outsized impact the legislation would have on our work. While we appreciate that this year’s version addresses some prior concerns, significant issues remain.

For these reasons, we respectfully oppose **S2584** as drafted. However, we remain committed to working with the bill sponsor and the Committee to develop a more equitable and effective approach—one that advances accessibility goals without undermining the production of much-needed affordable housing.

Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have. I can be reached at 401-721-5680 ext 104 or mlodge@housingnetworkri.org.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melina Lodge". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Melina Lodge, MCP
Executive Director