



March 26, 2026

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

RE: Oppose S2691

Dear Chairman Bissaillon and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Housing Network of Rhode Island, our member agencies, and the low income Rhode Islanders we seek to serve, I write in opposition of **S2691**, legislation that would make areas classified as GAA not eligible for density bonuses if developed.

During the last five legislative sessions, the growing need for more affordable housing in this state has taken center stage with policymakers. Historically low inventory of homes for sale and for rent coupled with exploding demand for housing have driven housing costs out of reach for many Rhode Islanders, particularly our lowest income households. Decades long reductions in building permit activity, restrictive land use policies set forth by municipalities, low vacancy rates, the state's chronic underinvestment in affordable housing and inadequate worker wages have all been major contributing factors to the lack of available homes and housing unaffordability. **The only way to solve our housing crisis is to start building our way out of it.**

S2691 moves us in a concerning direction by reinforcing local practices that have contributed to Rhode Island's housing challenges. Approximately 60% or more of the state falls within the GAA designation, and as written, the bill could broadly limit opportunities for higher-density development across a significant portion of Rhode Island—often defaulting to existing zoning that favors single-family housing.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that the Comprehensive Permit process already requires developers to meet all applicable regulatory standards, including those set by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management for water and wastewater. While protecting our natural resources remains essential, a broad, categorical approach may unintentionally constrain thoughtful, well-planned development that could otherwise meet these standards.

A more balanced path would allow proposals to be evaluated on their individual merits. By maintaining rigorous environmental and regulatory review while preserving flexibility in how projects are designed, developers are given the opportunity to put forward solutions that address both housing needs and resource protection. Projects that can demonstrate compliance should be allowed to move forward, while those that cannot should be appropriately denied.

For these reasons, we respectfully oppose **S2691** and urge the Committee to hold the bill. I am available to answer any questions you might have and can be reached at 401-721-5680 ext. 104 or mlodge@housingnetworkri.org.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melina Lodge".

Melina Lodge, MCP
Executive Director