

Senate Housing and Municipal Government Committee
March 23, 2026
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Subject: Support S 2691 — Low and Moderate Income Housing

Dear Chairman Bissaillon and Members of the Committee:

I respectfully urge the Committee to adopt S 2691. I thank the sponsors of this legislation for recognizing the need to reform Rhode Island's Low and Moderate Income (LMI) Housing Act to encourage responsible housing development that protects Rhode Island's drinking water supply.

I am a member of the Charlestown Planning Commission and have worked on land use issues in my community for over 20 years.

RI DEM Onsite Wastewater Treatment System rules focus on individual system compliance rather than cumulative impact analysis. While designed to prevent individual failures, they fail to address the collective, long-term nutrient loading from high-density, individual septic systems on groundwater and coastal watersheds.

In Charlestown, all homes depend on wells and septic systems. To protect our drinking water and the health of our freshwater and saltwater ponds, our town has relied on zoning to maintain enough upland area to filter contaminants before they reach the groundwater. For this reason, 3-acre zoning districts sit on top of aquifers, and 2-acre zoning districts cover areas that recharge them.

If a developer designates as little as 25% of units as affordable, the density bonuses in the current Low and Moderate Income Housing Act allow increases of 600% to 900% over the underlying zoning. Where one house was allowed in a 2-acre zone, seven can now be built; where one house was allowed in a 3-acre zone, ten can be built. Most developers propose the minimum number of affordable units, leaving 75% at market rate — but if a higher percentage of affordable units is proposed, these increases can climb as high as 2,400%, meaning 25 units where zoning allows only one. Our zoning is designed to protect our drinking water. These enormous density bonuses are not.

Rhode Island needs more low and moderate income housing and we need to protect our clean drinking water supplies. This bill accommodates low and moderate income housing without extreme negative impacts on the quantity or quality of Rhode Island's precious and irreplaceable drinking water supplies. I urge the Committee to adopt this bill and to consider extending protection to both GAA and GA waters.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Ruth L. Platner, 59 Maize Dr., Charlestown, RI 02813, 401-213-1710

Cc: Senate President Lawson, State Representative Tina Spears, State Senator Victoria Gu, State Senator Elaine Morgan, State Representative Megan Cotter