



**Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers
Stewardship Council**
PO Box 601 Westerly, RI 02891

March 25, 2026

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

Alex Rocha Committee Clerk: Slegislation@rilegislature.gov

RE: Support S 2691 Low and Moderate Income Housing

Dear Chairman Bissailon and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Wood Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council (Stewardship Council), I respectfully urge the Committee to adopt S 2691. I commend the sponsor of this important legislation, Senator Victoria Gu, and the co-sponsors, Senators Euer, DiMario, Murray and Burke for their leadership in recognizing the need to reform Rhode Island's Low and Moderate Income (LMI) Housing Act to protect irreplaceable drinking water resources and encouraging more responsible housing development.

The Stewardship Council, consisting of representatives of eight towns in Washington County (North Kingstown, West Greenwich, Exeter, Hopkinton, Richmond, Charlestown, South Kingstown, Westerly) and four towns in southeastern Connecticut, has the responsibility of protecting water quantity and quality in the Pawcatuck watershed. The seven rivers in the Pawcatuck watershed and their tributaries are part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, and were designated as such because of their special environmental, cultural and recreational value. These values are put at risk by the density bonuses in the existing legislation:

- The Pawcatuck watershed is a sole source aquifer. All of the drinking water for residents of the watershed is supplied by private or public wells that tap into one of the seven significant subsurface aquifers;
- Demand on the aquifer must not exceed its capacity to replenish itself;
- Development must be calibrated not to exceed capacity;
- Development can contribute to contamination of an aquifer through increased impervious surfaces and contaminated runoff;
- Contamination or exhaustion of a sole source aquifer would be disastrous for the population.

This bill provides common sense amendments to accommodate low and moderate income housing without negatively impacting the quantity or quality of Washington County's precious and irreplaceable drinking water supplies. The bill adds important language that the **capacity** of public water or sewer systems be documented to support the proposed increase in housing density before a development can be approved. The current law only requires developers to cite that public water or sewer systems are available. It is irresponsible to build more housing in areas that would exceed the capacity of either drinking water or sewer systems to serve that development.

The current LMI act allows a density bonus up to 8 housing units per acre in areas that have available drinking water. That's an increase from one house in a two-acre zone to 17 houses, or a 1700% increase in density! If a development had 25 two acre lots the density skyrockets from 25 houses to 425. In an area with a sole source aquifer and a prestigious national designation for its special environmental attributes, that is an excessive density bonus.

We also respectfully request that the committee consider amending this bill to include groundwater classified as GA. This is also a drinking water supply that can be used for public and private use without the need for any treatment. GA should be added to Section 45-53-4 (c) (1) (A) line 18.

The Stewardship Council understands the need for more low and moderate income housing in Rhode Island. However, housing must be developed that doesn't pollute drinking water or overextend limited ground water drinking supplies. Rhode Island must have clean, safe and sustainable drinking water supplies to support existing and encourage future growth and economic development. The Stewardship Council urges the committee to adopt this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

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

Antonia Bryson, Chair
Wood Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council

Cc: Senate President Valerie J. Lawson, sen-lawson@rilegislature.gov