



March 31, 2022

The Honorable Raymond A. Hull
Chair, House Municipal Government and Housing
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: H7940; H7941; H7945; H7946; H7950

Dear Chairman Hull and Members of the House Municipal Government and Housing Committee:

On behalf of the Housing Network of Rhode Island, I write to offer our support of **H7940, H7941, H7945, and H7950**, proposed legislation that would improve the effectiveness of existing processes, elevate the Deputy Secretary of Housing to a Cabinet level position, and provide municipal incentives for the development of lower income targeted affordable homes. I also wish to thank Speaker Shekarchi and the bill sponsors for their leadership and focus on this very important topic as we seek to make Rhode Island a place where all Rhode Islanders have access to safe and decent homes that are affordable to them in the community of their choice.

The Housing Network of Rhode Island is the State's membership association of 17 nonprofit community development agencies across Rhode Island. From Washington County to Woonsocket, our members have created more than 15,000 affordable homes. Our members are leaders within the communities they serve and have contributed to economic development, revitalization efforts, and the creation of healthy and vibrant neighborhoods in cities and towns throughout Rhode Island. The membership of HNRI is responsible for nearly 70% of the production and preservation of affordable homes made possible by funding from the 2006, 2012, and 2016 affordable housing bonds. Our organization and membership are committed to serving low income Rhode Islanders, who are vital contributors to our economy and have the right to safe, healthy, and affordable places to live.

HNRI also serves as the backbone organization for Homes RI, a collective impact effort focused on increasing the supply of safe, healthy, and affordable homes across Rhode Island. You can learn more about this effort at www.homesri.org.

With regards to **H7945**, we applaud the effort to amend the State Housing Appeals Board (SHAB) composition in such a way that it is able to do its job more effectively and efficiently.

With regards to **H7950**, we applaud the desire to create more transparent procedures related the long term monitoring of municipality subsidized affordable housing units, ensuring a consistency and accountability across our state's portfolio. With regards to **H7940** and **H7941**, I have had the opportunity to elevate some minor technical corrections and concerns with the Speaker and bill sponsors and wanted to share them with the Committee below.

H7940: I am grateful for the elevation of the Deputy Secretary position to a cabinet level position. With that said, I encourage the State to undertake a more in-depth review of the existing housing related management entities and their relationship to one another to better understand what type of staffing and structural supports would be needed to set up such a position and department for success. The development of housing, affordable housing finance and programs designed to support our most vulnerable residents to stay housed are highly complex and specialized fields and require a robust department of staff with the correct qualifications and experience to execute our housing goals well.

H7941: The current draft of this bill suggests that 25% of the units produced under a Comprehensive Permit must be provided as rental units targeted at 60% AMI at which point a municipality would receive (partial) credit for the all of the units created within the development towards its LMIH count. Bill language should be amended to reflect this as an incentive option, not a requirement. This recommendation is modeled after an incentive tool in MA that encourages communities to have a more active role in influencing the types of housing units (rental versus homeownership) that are developed in their community and rewards them for serving lower income households, where it is acknowledged there is greater need.

With regard to **H7946**, it appears to be a redundant effort to something the US Office of Housing and Development already reports on for all Public Housing Authorities utilizing a dashboard tool. Rhode Island Housing is one of 25 Public Housing Authorities in our state and does not have oversight authority over the others. The existing dashboard can be found at: https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/dashboard.

We will continue to work with bill sponsors to refine and strengthen the language of the bills we think require a Sub-A introduction. Thank you for the opportunity to share my expertise on this topic with this Committee and for your consideration of our suggestions. I am available to answer any questions you might have and can be reached at 401-721-5680 ext. 38 or mlodge@housingnetworkri.org.

Respectfully submitted,



Melina Lodge
Executive Director