



April 27, 2022

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

Re: in support of H7949

Dear Chairman Hull and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Housing Network of Rhode Island, I write to offer our support of **H7949**, proposed legislation that is aimed at streamlining several administrative functions related to low and moderate income housing. We applaud the Speaker, sponsors and General Assembly for prioritizing the important topic of housing 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. Our members have created more than 15,000 affordable homes, are leaders within their communities, 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. 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.

We appreciate the bill's aim 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, as well as creating more transparent procedures related the long term monitoring of municipality subsidized affordable housing units, ensuring a consistency and accountability across our state's portfolio.

I have had the opportunity to elevate a few minor technical corrections and concerns to the bill sponsors, which I have highlighted below:

- The pre-application conference which appears on page 5, item (3) is a very useful tool for early dialogue between the developer and the municipality about what the town needs and the developer is considering proposing. I would encourage that this element is not entirely stricken but amended to make it an optional component.
- Under 45-53-5, there is language that allows the SHAB to extend out its time period of review beyond the 9 month standard that it's being held to. Our concern is that this

language is not reflected in another bill (H7945) that establishes the 9 month standard. We also do not feel that it is appropriate that the entity charged with completing the task in a set amount of time, then also have the authority to give themselves more time. We believe that "...,which time period may only be extended by an affirmative vote of the SHAB to so extend the time, if circumstances demand more time..." should either be stricken in its entirety or further refined to establish some criteria around which circumstances would necessitate the need for more time, the length of time an extension could be made for and the number of extensions could be granted .

We will continue to work with bill sponsors to refine and strengthen the language of the bill. 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,

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

Melina Lodge
Executive Director