



March 27, 2025

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

RE: Comments and Conceptual Support for S275

Dear Chairman Bissaillon and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Housing Network of Rhode Island (HNRI), I write to offer comments and very high level conceptual support for S275, legislation intended to provide greater accessibility and usability for people with physical disabilities in new residential construction.

HNRI is the state's membership association of 18 nonprofit community development agencies across Rhode Island. HNRI and our membership are committed to serving low and moderate income Rhode Islanders, and have created more than 7,000 affordable homes across Rhode Island, which includes hundreds of units with accessible and adaptable design features.

We recognize and appreciate the intent of Senator Bell's bill to establish new building standards that promote inclusive design and functionality of new homes. According to HousingWorks' 2023 Fact Book, nearly 75,000 Rhode Islanders live with an ambulatory disability. Ensuring that Rhode Islanders with physical disabilities and older adults with mobility issues have access to housing that appropriately meets their needs is essential to creating inclusive and thriving communities, and creating a standard for new residential buildings is one way to accomplish this important objective.

While we appreciate the intent of the proposed legislation, as drafted we believe the bill would have chilling effects on the development of affordable housing and negatively impact the ability of low income households, with and without disabilities, to secure new housing opportunities. Incorporating universal design principles into new homes is important and laudable, but it will require additional resources as developers will be required to make adjustments to comply that will add to the total project cost. The punitive nature of the bill as drafted also would at worst serve as a deterrent and at minimum create construction delays as developers attempt to shift into compliance. Lastly, there is concern about the implications, if any, the proposed legislation may have on current permitting and zoning processes/systems. We are working on drafting specific remarks in response to the elements of the bill that we find most concerning and problematic and will share those comments with the bill sponsor for consideration.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer my comments. I am available to answer any questions members of the Committee may have and can be reached at 401-721-5680 ext. 104 or mlodge@housingnetworkri.org.

Respectfully submitted,

Melina Lodge, MCP, Executive Director