

March 27, 2025

The Honorable Senator Jacob Bissaillon
Chair, Senate Committee on Housing and Municipal Government
Rhode Island State House, 82 Smith Street, Providence RI 02903

Re: In Opposition of S-490, S-491, S-718

Dear Chair Bissaillon and Members of the Committee,

The mission of the Housing Network of Rhode Island (HNRI) is to increase the supply of safe, healthy, and affordable homes in thriving communities. We have a membership of 18 nonprofit affordable housing developers who own and operate more than 7,000 long-term rental and homeownership units for low- and moderate-income households. We are also the backbone organization for Homes RI, a coalition of 80+ organizations working together in support of our mission to increase affordable housing supply.

I write today to respectfully oppose the changes to the mandatory statewide rental registry proposed in bills S-490, S-491 and S-718. In 2023, after several years of advocacy from a cadre of supporters including health professionals, housing policy experts, attorneys, and impacted families, the General Assembly created a statewide, mandatory rental registry that helps foster public transparency and consumer protection, as well as serves as a useful source of data for the State and municipalities to better understand our rental home inventory. In 2024, the General Assembly affirmed the importance of implementing the registry as enacted by declining to include a provision from the proposed FY25 budget that would have undermined the effectiveness of the registry in the same way that these bills are proposing to do.

While we understand the challenges of implementation on new initiatives such as a rental registry, it is important to note that the inception of the registry was designed to work as a system check to help enforce compliance of existing lead hazard mitigation laws. Available evidence suggests the registry is largely functioning as intended. In the interest of protecting vulnerable children and families, transparency, and understanding our rental housing stock, we oppose the provisions in the proposed legislation that would stall or reverse progress on the implementation of the registry. Specifically, we have concerns regarding:

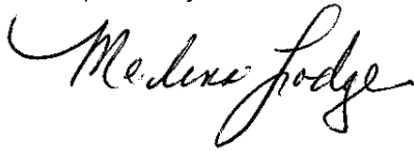
- **S-490** limits public access to the registry. This is one of the only ways that a tenant may be able to verify whether their rental unit complies with applicable health and safety laws, and to see who owns their unit.
- Language in **S-491** that exempts pre-1978 housing from the *Lead Hazard Mitigation Act* that “does not include an at-risk occupant.” Rental units inherently have tenant turnover, and we are concerned that this language could unintentionally bias landlords from renting available units to families with young children or expecting parents, if the unit is not in compliance with lead laws. It is also unclear how this would be enforced or not, because it

is largely unknown who lives within individual private market rental units. It leaves it up to a tenant to understand whether their unit should be covered, rather than ensuring that all units are compliant with lead laws designed to protect all occupants.

- **S-718** undermines the effectiveness of the registry by limiting the number of properties that must be registered. It also delays implementation, even though it is already underway.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony and the consideration of our comments by the Committee. We respectfully encourage the Committee to oppose these three bills, and to continue to uphold the integrity of the registry law that this esteemed body has implemented. I am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have. I can be reached at (401) 721-5680 ext. 104 or mlodge@housingnetworkri.org.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melina Lodge". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Respectfully,".

Melina Lodge, Executive Director