



March 11, 2025

The Honorable Stephen Casey
Chair, House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street, Providence RI 02903

Re: Support for House Bills 5796, 5797, 5798, 5799, and 5800

Dear Chair Casey 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. On behalf of HNRI and our membership of 19 nonprofit affordable housing developers, I write in **strong support of House Bills 5796, 5797, 5798, 5799, and 5800**. We thank Speaker Shekarchi and the bill sponsors for their sustained leadership on housing and for advancing a comprehensive package of legislation that supports increased opportunities to build more homes for Rhode Islanders that are critically needed.

The cost of housing – including the price of homes for rent, homes for sale, construction, and utilities - has increased dramatically since 2019, and people cannot keep pace. There are not enough homes being built, and the choked supply, combined with upward economic pressures and inflation, means more Rhode Islanders are facing housing instability, or are stuck in homes that no longer match their life's circumstances. These five housing bills build on prior legislation and further our progress in reducing barriers to residential development and promoting diverse housing options:

H-5796 (Knight) encourages higher density development in areas within the urban services boundary, which have available public water and sewer capacity. This is smart land use policy that ensures different types of housing besides single-family homes can be built where there is already infrastructure to support them, and enhances thriving communities by enabling the creation of more living options in places where residents can easily connect to public services, transit, commerce, and jobs.

H-5797 (McEntee) adds co-living housing as a zoning definition under state law, enabling cities and towns to incorporate and adopt more diverse living arrangements within their local ordinances to allow for housing mobility and choice as resident's circumstances dictate.

H-5798 (Speakman) allows for the construction of attached single-family dwellings (for example, townhomes) in designated zoning districts. As prices for single-family homes have skyrocketed, there is increasing demand for more affordable options. Townhomes present a great option for would-be homebuyers, as they are typically more affordable, promote a sense of communal living, and do not come with the same restrictions and fees that homes built as part of a condominium association homes do, which can present challenges to residents in later years of ownership.

H-5799 (Cruz) would allow provisions for subdividing oversized lots and for modifications to support residential development while preserving neighborhood character. This bill will enable communities and property owners to use existing land more efficiently, and allowing administrative modifications to dimensional requirements will help to preserve a sense of place and community character while supporting flexibility of new residential development.

H-5800 (Craven) promotes mixed-use residential development by establishing provisions for residential development within certain commercial and village zones. Like other proposals within this housing package, this legislation will help us to utilize existing land and commercial use structures (such as flat-topped strip malls) more effectively to provide more housing options for Rhode Islanders.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my support of these important pieces of legislation with this Committee, and respectfully urge the Committee to advance these bills. I am available to answer any questions you might have and can be reached at 401-721-5680 ext. 104 or mlodge@housingnetworkri.org.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Melina Lodge, Executive Director