



March 20, 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 5801, 5802, 5803, and 5804

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 18 nonprofit affordable housing developers, I write in **strong support of House Bills 5801, 5802, 5803, and 5804**. 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 four housing bills build on prior legislation and further our progress in reducing barriers to residential development and ensuring cities and towns create opportunities for low- and moderate-income housing.

H-5801 (Speakman) clarifies definitions of and procedures for approval of developing low- and moderate-income housing. The proposed legislation makes two significant and important changes to the definition of whether LMI housing exists in relation to consistency with local needs. Firstly, it makes clear that the ten percent (10%) benchmark does not serve as a ceiling for LMI housing units but rather a floor. Secondly, it removes language that previously allowed municipalities with a higher percentage of rental housing stock to be considered “exempt” under the LMIH Act, regardless of whether the units are deed-restricted affordable housing or able to be counted as LMI housing under the § 45-53 statute. The bill clarifies that municipalities shall provide applicants with a density bonus by-right regardless of whether they have LMI housing in excess of 10%. These provisions build on previous amendments to the LMIH Act and represent clear direction from the state that the development of affordable housing is an essential component of achieving our overall housing goals that every municipality must participate in.

H-5802 (Noret), H-5803 (Shekarchi) and H-5804 (Shekarchi) provide various amendments that establish processes for streamlining and clarifying procedural elements of state property development, e-permitting, and the roles of various state officials, boards, commissions,

respectively. As with other policy proposals that the Speaker has championed, these technical changes, clarifications, procedural definitions, and centralization efforts all serve to improve efficiency within different aspects of the building and development process and ensure practitioners have clear guidance to exercise their duties. Together, these bills strengthen our system for housing production across state and local governments.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my support of these important pieces of legislation with this Committee and I urge your support 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". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Melina Lodge, Executive Director