



March 19, 2025

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

Re: Support for House Bill 0501

Dear Chair Bissailon and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Housing Network of Rhode Island, our members, and the low-income Rhode Islanders we serve, I write to offer our support of **S-0501**. We appreciate the leadership of both the Rhode Island House and Senate to address fundamental gaps in our housing systems and to improve the quality of life for Rhode Islanders across the state, and for your efforts and those of the bill's cosponsors in introducing this bill.

S-0501 represents a solutions-oriented approach to enable the construction of RDUs (rapidly deployable units – referred to as “supportive and versatile emergency or SAVE” units in the legislation) that can be used to provide temporary life safety and shelter for people experiencing homelessness. This winter, Rhode Island experienced multiple events of extreme and life-threatening cold, and our current emergency shelter system is at capacity. There are not enough permanent, affordable, and available homes to meet the burgeoning need. Today’s economic conditions, including high rents, static incomes (particularly at the lowest end), and lack of available units, are pushing more and more Rhode Islanders into homelessness. Homeless service providers and support agencies are doing the best they can to maximize limited resources, particularly as pandemic-era relief spending winds down, but systemic barriers remain that prevent people from being housed and sheltered quickly enough – literally leaving people out in the cold.

The State and municipalities have an essential role to play in facilitating the deployment of life-saving interventions to their constituents during an emergency. This legislation attempts to make this duty of care clear when it comes to the temporary shelter needs of unhoused Rhode Islanders, and we commend the bill cosponsors for their responsiveness to this issue. As the Committee considers the bill, we respectfully want to highlight there are some components within the legislation that may benefit from further clarification or exploration, including:

- Whether there can be flexibility around the timing of an emergency declaration, given how long it may take to construct units and then place people within them. Supplementary to that, whether there could be flexibility around the period during which municipalities have to renew the emergency declaration. For example, could a municipal council vote to approve an emergency declaration for a longer period of time, based on local community needs and conditions.

- Specifying the time periods for construction and occupancy, in consideration of the emergency declaration provision. Section 5 (b) and (c) state “the declaration shall only be for purposes of allowing for the construction and temporary occupancy of SAVE units during severe weather”...and that “such a declaration of emergency shall only be valid for 30 days and...shall not exceed 180 days per calendar year.”
- Clarifying procedures for ending an emergency declaration period, including notice requirements to people occupying the units, community service providers or project partners, to ensure a smooth transition for the municipality, unhoused residents, supportive services agencies, and other community partners.
- Provisions or procedures for authorizing a municipality to allow for an extended period of occupancy if the people in the units are unable to transition to a more stable living situation / permanent housing at the end of the declared emergency period.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support for this critical legislation. I encourage the Committee to advance the bill for passage while considering the refinements mentioned above, which were informed by practitioner members of the Housing Network.

I welcome any questions you might have and can be reached at 401-721-5680 ext. 104 or mlodge@housingnetworkri.org.

Respectfully submitted,



Melina Lodge
Executive Director