



March 20, 2024

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

RE: In support of **S495**

Dear Chairman Bissaillon and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Housing Network of Rhode Island, our member agencies, and the thousands of low income Rhode Islanders we serve, we write in support of **S495**, legislation that would create a Housing Champion program.

During the last four legislative sessions, the growing need for more affordable housing in this state has taken center stage with policymakers. Historically low inventory of homes for sale and for rent coupled with exploding demand for housing have driven housing costs out of reach for many Rhode Islanders, particularly our lowest income households. Decades long reductions in building permit activity, restrictive land use policies, low vacancy rates, the state's chronic underinvestment in affordable housing and inadequate worker wages have all been major contributing factors to the lack of available homes and housing unaffordability. These points all underscore the importance of the Speaker's mantra of "Production, production, production."

Municipalities are a critical partner in this endeavor and their support or resistance to new housing development has tangible and lasting impact on the state's housing production goals. The tool proposed in **S495** can be a useful lever for the state to help incentivize productive municipal participation in solving our housing crisis and creates a framework for evaluation of municipal activities related to residential development.

We have offered the following edits/recommendations to the bill's sponsor for their consideration.

1. That the Department of Housing replace the Commerce Corporation as the agency authorized to establish the Housing Champion program.
2. That the program be expanded to consider the full spectrum of municipal activities related to housing, both good and bad. While the ability to be prioritized for certain funds may serve as a motivation for some municipalities, there should also be a punitive element for those municipalities that fail to take any actions or undertake counterproductive or harmful measures.

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on **S495**. I am happy to answer any questions and can be reached at 401-721-5680 x 104 or mlodge@housingnetworkri.org.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melina Lodge". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Melina Lodge
Executive Director