



April 9, 2025

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

**RE: Conceptual Support with comments for H5374**

Dear Chairman Casey and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Housing Network of Rhode Island (HNRI), I write to offer comments and very high level conceptual support for **H5374**, legislation intended to provide greater accessibility and usability for people with physical disabilities in new residential construction.

HNRI is the state's membership association of 18 nonprofit community development agencies across Rhode Island. HNRI and our membership are committed to serving low and moderate income Rhode Islanders, and have created more than 7,000 affordable homes across Rhode Island, which includes hundreds of units with accessible and adaptable design features.

We recognize and appreciate the intent of Representative Stewart's bill to establish new building standards that promote inclusive design and functionality of new homes. According to HousingWorks' 2023 Fact Book, nearly 75,000 Rhode Islanders live with some type of ambulatory disability. Ensuring that Rhode Islanders with physical disabilities and older adults with mobility issues have access to not only housing that appropriately meets their physical needs but also their social wellbeing needs is essential to creating inclusive and thriving communities, and creating a standard for new residential buildings is one way to accomplish this important objective.

While we appreciate the intent of the proposed legislation, as drafted we believe the bill would have chilling effects on the development of affordable housing and negatively impact the ability of low income households, with and without disabilities, to secure new housing opportunities. Incorporating universal design principles into new homes is important and laudable, but it will require additional resources as developers will be required to make adjustments to comply that will add to the total project cost. The punitive nature of the bill as drafted also would at worst serve as a deterrent and at minimum create construction delays as developers attempt to shift into compliance. Lastly, there is concern about the implications, if any, the proposed legislation may have on current permitting and zoning processes/systems. We are working on drafting specific remarks in response to the elements of the bill that we find most concerning and problematic and will share those comments with the bill sponsor for consideration.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer my comments and conceptual support of **H5374**. I am available to answer any questions members of the Committee may have and can be reached at 401-721-5680 ext. 104 or [mlodge@housingnetworkri.org](mailto:mlodge@housingnetworkri.org).

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melina Lodge".

Melina Lodge, MCP, Executive Director