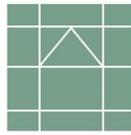


H O U S I N G



N E T W O R K

## **Housing advocates highlight need for state-funded rental subsidy program to support low-income Rhode Islanders**

**PROVIDENCE** – The Housing Network of Rhode Island (HNRI) convened housing advocates, including partner organizations and elected officials, at the State House today to highlight legislation intended to provide more permanent, affordable homes to the most vulnerable Rhode Islanders.

Speaking in the State Library, advocates voiced their support for [House Bill 7803](#) and [Senate Bill 2681](#), calling for a state-funded rental subsidy for those experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, who are extremely low-income or disabled with a need for supportive services.

The proposed subsidy would provide project-based rental assistance aligned to tenants' income to help reduce reliance on emergency shelters, improve housing stability, and complement existing federal homeless assistance resources.

This legislation would direct funds to support the most vulnerable, extremely low-income and disabled Rhode Islanders. Extremely low income (ELI) refers to those with incomes at or below the poverty level or 30% of their area median income, whichever is greater. In Rhode Island, that means a person making no more than \$25,000 a year, or \$32,150 for a family of three.

“As an alliance of organizations who envision a Rhode Island where all of its residents live in safe, healthy, and affordable homes in thriving communities, the Housing Network recognizes the need to prioritize policy solutions that address our housing affordability crisis,” said **Katie West, Director of Strategic Partnerships for the Housing Network of Rhode Island**. “Strengthening state-level tools to support the lowest-income and most vulnerable Rhode Islanders is a critical step toward ensuring that residents can access and maintain stable housing, regardless of shifts in federal policy.”

“Rhode Island has taken important steps to increase housing production, but for many Rhode Islanders – especially those with disabilities and extremely low incomes – even affordable housing is still out of reach,” said **Rep. Scott Slater, sponsor of House Bill 7803**. “Housing is the foundation that allows people to work, stay healthy, and participate meaningfully in their communities. This bill moves us closer to a system where the most vulnerable Rhode Islanders are not left behind.”

“We know that homelessness is extraordinarily expensive for our public systems. When people do not have stable housing, they are far more likely to rely on emergency shelters, hospital rooms, crisis behavioral health services, and other costly interventions. Providing targeted rental subsidies helps break that cycle,” said **Sen.**

**Melissa Murray, sponsor of Senate Bill 2681.** “This rental subsidy proposal is not only the right thing to do – it is the fiscally responsible thing to do.”

Rhode Island’s housing stability currently relies heavily on federal programs that are becoming increasingly uncertain. Federal Continuum of Care (CoC) funded housing programs often serve individuals and families with the highest barriers to housing stability, yet available rental assistance is insufficient to ensure long-term affordability and stability.

According to *The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes*, a report released last week by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, ELI renters in Rhode Island face a shortage of 23,222 rental homes affordable and available to them.

As a result, 70% of extremely low-income renters in R.I. are housing cost-burdened, spending more than 30% of their income on housing.

Of Rhode Island’s 50,063 extremely low-income renters, 55% are severely housing cost-burdened, spending more than half of their income on housing with little left over for food, health care, and other basic necessities.

“A little more than a year ago, while I was living in a tent, I started speaking out for the homeless. I then moved into a motel shelter, followed by a cooperative apartment, which is a step toward senior housing. This is the reality I share with many people in Rhode Island: although I am thankful to have a roof over my head, I struggle daily to maintain it because it takes up seventy percent of my fixed income. This type of rental subsidy program would help close the gap between people’s incomes and their rents, providing peace of mind and much-needed stability to severely cost-burdened Rhode Islanders like me,” said **housing advocate Donn King**.

Without subsidy, the private market is unable to provide an adequate supply of housing affordable to the lowest-income renters. What extremely low-income renters can afford to pay for rent does not cover the development and operating costs of new housing, and it often is not sufficient to provide an incentive for landlords to maintain older housing.

Subsidies are needed to produce new affordable housing, preserve existing affordable housing, or subsidize the difference between what the lowest-income renters can afford to pay and market rents.

The proposed Rhode Island rental subsidy legislation intends to help build infrastructure for housing stability at the state level, at a time when R.I. is heavily dependent on increasingly unstable federal resources.

“For the people we serve, the difference between stability and homelessness often comes down to whether they can afford the rent,” said **Michelle Wilcox, President and CEO of Crossroads Rhode Island**. “Right now, thousands of extremely low-income Rhode Islanders simply cannot keep up with rising housing costs, and the private market alone cannot close that gap. A state rental subsidy would give our most vulnerable neighbors a real chance to stay housed and prevent homelessness before it begins. At a time when federal resources are increasingly uncertain, Rhode Island needs strong state tools like this to protect housing stability.”

“Ultimately, the solution to homelessness is housing. But housing development is about more than building structures – it’s about building a system that works. And a system

that works is one that provides safe, stable housing and is accessible to our most vulnerable neighbors. With this legislation, Rhode Island takes a critical step toward a system where the homes we build can actually serve the people who need them most," said **Charlie Thomas-Davison, Director of Real Estate Development, Women's Development Corporation.**

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**The Housing Network of Rhode Island (HNRI)** works to increase and preserve the supply of high-quality affordable homes across Rhode Island through coalition building, increasing public support, and policy advocacy. Our vision is that all Rhode Islanders live in safe, healthy, and affordable homes in thriving communities.

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