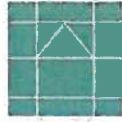


H O U S I N G



N E T W O R K

May 15, 2024

The Honorable Marvin Abney
Chair, House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI

Re: Support H8000

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Housing Network of Rhode Island, our member agencies, and the low income Rhode Islanders we serve, I write to offer our support of **H8000**. We applaud the General Assembly's sustained attention on urgent housing issues and driving change to improve access to and affordability of homes for hundreds of thousands of Rhode Islanders. We thank Representative Morales and the bill's co-sponsors for their introduction of this bill.

During the last three legislative sessions, the high cost of housing and the growing need for more affordable homes have taken center stage. Historically low inventory of homes for sale and for rent coupled with exploding demand for housing have driven 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 ultimately, housing unaffordability.

Low inventory and high demand for seasonal, vacation and student rentals put additional pressure on an already tight market and RI renter households, and in particular low-income renter households, have been disproportionately impacted by the problem. In October 2023, Zillow's Rent Report found that Providence experienced the highest rent increase nationwide with a 7.5% increase over last year. Moreover, since 2019, Providence rents had increased 48%, to a whopping \$2,074 per month for a 2-bedroom apartment! According HousingWorks RI Factbook, the average 2-bedroom rent in RI was \$1,996. A tenant household would need approximately \$80,000 in annual income to afford this rate, yet median tenant income is only \$41,277 annually.

H8000 has a two-fold effect – 1) it stabilizes rents for low income tenants and 2) provides an incentive to landlords to keep rents more reasonably priced. We appreciate Representative Morales' recognition of the need for this critical tool and proposing this pilot program.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my support of **H8000**. 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 black ink that reads "Melina Lodge". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Melina Lodge, Executive Director