

January 23, 2024

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey , Chairman
House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing
State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: House Bill No. [7063](#)

On behalf of the Senior Agenda Coalition of RI I am pleased to support H7063 AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- RHODE ISLAND HOUSING AND RESOURCES ACT OF 1998 sponsored by Representatives Spears, Cotter, Craven, Finkelman, Dawson, Kazarian, Casimiro, Slater, Cortvriend, and O'Brien. The mission of our Coalition is to mobilize people to achieve power in order to implement an agenda that improves the quality of life of older Rhode Islanders. We accomplish this through *community organizing, public education and legislative advocacy*.

H7063 requires all new low and moderate-income housing to be constructed using specific universal design principles to include universal access for wheelchair users to require ramps, elevators when necessary, wheelchair accessible entrances and exits and safety and wayfinding features. Rhode Island has extremely old housing stock. Housing Works RI reports that three-quarters of our housing stock is more than forty years old. Much of this housing lacks accessibility features needed by persons with disabilities and older persons with ambulatory difficulties.

Our state's population of persons age 65 and over currently comprises one out of five persons (20%) of our total population and is projected to continue to grow during this decade. The 2020 RI Healthy Aging Data Report shows 21 percent of RI older adults with a self-reported ambulatory difficulty which can make them more prone to falls in housing with outside stairs for access and stairs inside multi-level homes. As the older population continues to grow we can expect the numbers with ambulatory difficulties to increase.

As family size decreases and the burden of upkeep associated with larger homes becomes challenging, many older households wish to relocate to smaller homes or to move to rental units. However, it can be challenging to find accessible single-family homes or accessible apartments for rent. And there are long wait lists for subsidized housing units for low-income older adults and persons with disabilities. As state plans for investing millions of dollars to develop affordable housing for low and moderate-income persons it is important that the needs of older adults and persons with disabilities are recognized by requiring universal accessibility into designs of this new housing.

Sincerely,
Maureen Maigret, Policy Advisor
Senior Agenda Coalition of RI