



March 7, 2024

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

RE: Support for H-7377- Rhode Island Inclusive Home Design Act

Dear Chairman Casey and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Housing Network of Rhode Island (HNRI), I write to offer support and comments for bill H-7377, 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 16 nonprofit community development agencies across Rhode Island. Our members have created more than 7,500 affordable homes across Rhode Island. HNRI and our membership are committed to serving low and moderate income Rhode Islanders.

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 an ambulatory disability. Ensuring that Rhode Islanders with physical disabilities and older adults with mobility issues have access to housing that appropriately meets their 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 support the intent of the proposed legislation, we encourage the Committee and the bill sponsors to carefully consider any potential impacts to the construction of new subsidized housing for low and moderate income households. 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. We also would encourage study of any implications the proposed legislation may have on permitting and zoning for projects that will need to be taken into account. Given this, we recommend that the Committee hold the bill for further study at this time.

On behalf of HNRI, we are happy to work with Rep. Stewart and the bill's cosponsors to ensure the intent of the proposed legislation is preserved while considering its application and potential impacts on new construction. 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.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Melina Lodge, MCP, Executive Director