



March 12, 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-7534 – An Act Relating to Towns and Cities – City Housing Authorities

Dear Chairman Casey and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Housing Network of Rhode Island (HNRI), I write to offer support for bill H-7534, legislation that would clarify the role of the Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation (RIHousing) as the only Public Housing Agency (PHA) authorized to administer HUD Project Based Rental Assistance, also known as Section 8, in Rhode Island.

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. One of our Providence based members, Omni Development Corporation, supports 518 of their low income housing units with Project Based Rental Assistance.

RIHousing has administered PBRA contracts on behalf of the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development for over 20 years. As the statewide PHA for Rhode Island, RIHousing is best positioned to administer the PBRA contracts effectively and respond to tenant concerns promptly. Their staff has in-depth knowledge of the developments and has built extensive relationships with property managers and tenants. RIHousing's understanding of the developments has also facilitated the long-term preservation of these units as affordable housing which is especially important during the serious affordable housing shortage facing the state. In the last 10 years alone, RIHousing has financed the preservation of 53 Section 8 developments covered by the PBCA contract. Having RIHousing serving in this role also allows local owners to be connected to the resources they need to rehabilitate the developments and preserve their affordability for the long-term.

In recent years, U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development has made several attempts to rebid these contracts to allow out-of-state entities to oversee these developments. This bill would ensure that we retain local control over these important contracts and that RIHousing would continue to effectively administer the Section 8 multifamily contracts in the state. The bill would not change any other aspect of the role that RIHousing has played with respect to these developments. Maintaining state-level oversight of these developments ensures that issues can be addressed quickly and appropriately by locally based staff. Rhode Islanders are best supported by these contracts being administered locally with staff that are familiar with the developments and tenants and not an out of state entity.

This is an important bill and I urge the Committee to support it. I am available to answer any questions 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, Executive Director