



March 19, 2024

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey
Chair, House Municipal Government and Housing Committee
Rhode Island State House, 82 Smith Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: Support for HB 7699 – An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government – Rhode Island Housing and Conservation Trust Fund Act

Dear Chair Casey and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of ONE Neighborhood Builders, a Rhode Island housing and community development organization based in Providence, I write in support of House Bill 7699, which would amend the Rhode Island Housing and Conservation Trust Fund Act to facilitate the Fund's ability to 1) create and sustain quality, affordable housing for Rhode Islanders earning low- and moderate-incomes and 2) conserve and protect Rhode Island's natural resources and quality of life for people living in our state.

This bill's proposed amendments to the Rhode Island Housing and Conservation Trust Act include important changes to the RI Housing and Conservation board, including increasing the number of members from 9 to 15 to ensure better representation of RI's diverse communities. The amendments also set up an account at the RI Infrastructure Bank that will ultimately receive and expend funding associated with the Trust and improve the fund allocation. We believe that these revisions will kickstart partnerships between affordable housing and conversation organizations, allowing for progress on our shared goals and dispelling the myth that our causes are at odds.

I have some specific suggestions on the bill language regarding housing affordability, the right of first refusal, and deed restrictions that I would be happy to discuss further with the bill sponsors.

Our state legislature has a critical role to play in incentivizing the development of quality, safe, and affordable housing for Rhode Islanders. Thank you to Speaker Shekarchi, Representative Speakman, and the entire House of Representatives for prioritizing housing production and affordability.

I urge the Committee to support House Bill 7699 with these changes to tighten the language to advance quality, affordable housing in Rhode Island.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Hawkins", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jennifer Hawkins
President & CEO, ONE Neighborhood Builders