



March 19, 2024

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

RE: In support of H7699

Dear Chairman Casey and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Housing Network of Rhode Island (HNRI), our member agencies, and the low income Rhode Islanders we seek to serve, I write in support of **H7699**, legislation that seeks to increase stakeholder participation in the administration of the Rhode Island Housing and Conservation Trust Fund and redistributes Trust resources to increase the allocation for housing and conservation activities.

HNRI is the State's membership association of 16 nonprofit community development agencies across Rhode Island. From Westerly to Woonsocket, our members have created more than 7,500 affordable homes. They are leaders within the communities they serve and have contributed to economic development, revitalization efforts, and the creation of healthy and vibrant neighborhoods in cities and towns throughout Rhode Island.

In order to develop vibrant thriving communities, we need to be able to contemplate and balance several high-level priorities at the same time. Too often we find ourselves forced to pick and choose between priorities simply because of the lack of financial resources and shared stakeholder forums for productive dialogue.

H7699 proposes to reinvigorate an effort that Rhode Island undertook in 1990 to address two such high-level priorities – the need to create and sustain low and moderate income housing and conserve and protect Rhode Island's natural resources – simultaneously, which we believe is a very important first step in ensuring comprehensive land use policy and decision making.

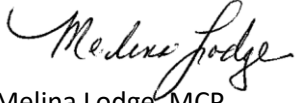
H7699 would make three basic improvements to the current law:

1. Increase the number of board members from 9 to 15 to ensure a better representation of Rhode Island's diverse communities, and seek the appointment of stakeholders from the affordable housing, land use planning, and conservation communities;
2. Create a designated account at the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank to receive and expend future funding, and include additional funding sources that the trust fund can access; and
3. Improve the allocation of how future funds can be spent between low- and moderate-income housing and land conservation projects to achieve our overarching goals.

While **H7699** does not request funding at this time to capitalize the fund, we believe there is real value in re-establishing the board to spur better collaboration and planning towards mutual goals between these two important sectors.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill and for the Committee's consideration of **H7699**. 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, MCP
Executive Director