



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
Rhode Island Department of Housing
80 Washington Street, 2nd Floor
Providence, RI 02903

March 28, 2024

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

Dear Chairman Casey,

I write in general support for bills H7977, H7978, H7979, H7980, and H7981 which are part of Speaker Shekarchi's 2024 housing package aiming to address Rhode Island's housing challenges.

Housing affordability continues to be a crucial issue in Rhode Island and we thank the General Assembly and Speaker Shekarchi for continuing to prioritize this matter.

H7977 would create an eleven-member commission focused improving the pipeline of planners, planning technicians and staff in our state. Ensuring cities and towns have the qualified planners they need is important. Additionally, given the Department's role and efforts in assisting municipalities with increased staffing capacity, we welcome the opportunity to participate in this commission.

H7978 aims to streamline permitting by requiring municipalities to implement electronic permitting for all development projects. We strongly support this proposal and are grateful to the Department of Business Regulation and the cities and towns that have already made significant strides thanks to the e-permitting system. In order to align with our work, in general, as well as required state housing reports in particular, the Department of Housing respectfully requests being included as a collaborator in the rules and regulations formation. This initiative will reduce administrative burden for municipalities when providing data to the State for required reports and improve data quality.

H7979 would enable municipalities to establish "combined review boards" which has the potential to streamline the permitting and approval process for developments. We support this initiative and believe it has the potential to unlock local innovation in support of facilitating development. Over time, we aim to identify additional ways to enable and encourage municipal initiative and innovation.

H7980 and H7981 also aim to continue to simplify and streamline land use decisions and permitting across the state. We support efforts that allow for such efficiencies because this will ultimately lead to a smoother review process and increased opportunities for development.

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We would like to thank this committee, the bill sponsors, and Speaker Shekarchi for the continued work on housing issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stefan Pryor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'S' at the beginning.

Stefan Pryor
Secretary of Housing

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee
Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy