



March 28, 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 7977 – House Resolution Creating a Special Legislative Commission to Study the Ability of the Rhode Island Educational System to Offer Degree or Certificate Programs Within the State to Provide a Supply and Pipeline of Planners, Planning Technicians;
HB 7978 – An Act Relating to Towns and Cities – Subdivision of Land;
HB 7979 – An Act Relating to Towns and Cities – Local Planning Board or Commission;
HB 7980 – An Act Relating to Motor and Other Vehicles – Mobile and Manufactured Homes;
HB 7981 – An Act Relating to Towns and Cities – Zoning Ordinances;
HB 7984 – An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government – Rhode Island Housing Resources Act of 1998

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 strong support of the bills being heard tonight that are part of Speaker Shekarchi's bill package: House Bills 7977, 7978, 7979, 7980, 7981, and 7984. These bills would enable technical changes that would incentivize the production, preservation, and protection of quality, affordable housing in Rhode Island.

Access to quality housing that a household can afford is necessary for every Rhode Islander. Our housing crisis is a significant problem, but we know how to address it. Thus, Rhode Island must leverage every tool available to us to produce, preserve, and protect affordable housing at the scale we need.

HB 7979, sponsored by Speaker Shekarchi, would enable municipalities to establish "combined review boards" to replace separate planning and zoning boards. Currently, ONE Neighborhood Builders must prepare for and receive approval from both local planning and zoning boards for most of our housing developments. If municipalities had combined review boards, developers and municipalities would save substantial money and time, and developers could develop housing for residents faster. In addition, combining zoning and planning boards can facilitate greater municipal collaboration, which could enable more holistic community development.

HB 7984, sponsored by Representative McEntee, would allow municipalities to include mobile and manufactured housing as affordable housing if it is the occupant's primary residence, is

within a resident-owned community, and complies with federal manufactured home construction and safety standards. This bill would encourage cities and towns to allow for more varied types of housing to be counted towards the 10% provision of the Low- and Moderate-Income Housing Act that at least ten percent of the housing stock for each municipality is low- or moderate-income housing (RI Gen. Laws § 45-53-3). Further, the condition of resident ownership promotes equity-building and resident control in manufactured and mobile homes.

Rhode Island [had](#) the lowest per capita rate of new housing construction of any U.S. state in 2022, and Rhode Island [has](#) a shortage of approximately 24,000 rental homes that are available and affordable to households earning extremely low incomes (for a household of four people, this is an annual income of \$31,000). ONE Neighborhood Builders has built almost 600 rental and for-sale homes for low- and moderate-income households, and our community development and non-profit colleagues have built hundreds more. However, this is not enough housing to close this gap in need for affordable units.

Our state legislature has a critical role to play in incentivizing the development of quality, safe, and affordable housing for Rhode Islanders. Speaker Shekarchi, Representative Giraldo, Representative McEntee, and the entire House of Representatives have prioritized housing production and affordability as two of the most important policy issues our state must address. The House's leadership on this issue is moving our state forward in a meaningful way, but since these are large and complex problems, we need to continue to advance multi-pronged solutions.

I strongly urge the Committee to support House Bills 7977, 7978, 7979, 7980, 7981, and 7984 to advance quality, affordable housing in Rhode Island.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Hawkins
President & CEO, ONE Neighborhood Builders