

February 4, 2025

Dear Chairman Casey and Members of  
the House Municipal Government and Housing Committee:

I am writing to you as a homeowner in North Providence to express my support for House Bill 5100. I also volunteer with AARP on behalf of older adults in our state.

I have followed with dismay the ongoing saga of ECHO Village in Providence, which was designed for rapid implementation as a means of ameliorating homelessness but has unfortunately become mired in red tape during the building process, leaving homeless people to suffer brutally cold winter weather without shelter. I lived in Providence for 19 years, and observed at first hand how acute and seemingly intractable the issue of homelessness has been. Despite the best efforts of Crossroads Rhode Island and other non-profits, we have seen the level of homelessness increase in Rhode Island with every economic downturn. ECHO Village is part of a serious attempt to chip away at the problem of homelessness, and it reflects an important collaboration of municipal government and non-profits to create humane and dignified temporary shelters for the homeless.

Among the causes of homelessness are the growing cost of housing and the rate of eviction. These issues are particularly acute for older adults in Rhode Island. Crossroads Rhode Island saw a 33% increase in homeless seniors over the age of 65 in 2023. AARP now estimates that between 2023 and 2027, we can expect that 800 Rhode Islanders over the age of 65 will face eviction, and 300 of them will become homeless. A Department of Health & Human Services report in 2023 stated that older adults are the fastest-growing age group among those experiencing homelessness. Due to their declining immune systems, older adults are also less likely to survive the severe weather conditions that the homeless must endure .

I support H.B. 5100 because it would make it easier for Rhode Island cities and towns to create shelters like ECHO Village for the homeless in times of need. Given the absolute chaos with which the Federal government has been operating of late and the likelihood of cuts to the Federal safety net, we can no longer rely on Federal resources to help us out of this problem. It is more important than ever that our cities and towns have the flexibility at the state and local level to act in a timely manner in addressing the level of homelessness in our communities, without having to face endless red tape.

For all of these reasons, I urge you to approve H. B. 5100.

Sincerely yours,

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