



April 10, 2025

To: The Honorable Members, House Committee on Housing and Municipal Government

From: Carol Costa, SACRI Executive Director
Hearing 4-10-2025

Re: H5268 and H 5374

The mission of the Senior Agenda Coalition (SACRI) is to mobilize people to achieve power in order to implement an agenda that improves the quality of life of older Rhode Islanders. On behalf of SACRI, I offer comments to support the purpose of these bills to address the critical need for increasing our state's supply of affordable and accessible housing options for persons of all ages with mobility challenges.

SACRI appreciates the tremendous effort that Speaker Shekarchi and so many members of the legislature are making to find solutions to the housing crisis that impacts all our families including our older householders. The issues are complex and critical and we applaud their commitment to working to address the housing crisis. We also note recent made by RI Housing to ramp up requirements for accessibility features in developments they help fund. However, is needed to meet a growing demand.

Housing is an important issue for our older population and a priority for SACRI.

Persons age 65 and over comprise one out of five persons in RI and, in some communities, they comprise more than 30% of the population. As the “Baby Boomers” grow older these numbers will increase during this decade. Our state has an extremely old housing stock and much of it lacks accessibility features needed by persons with ambulatory/mobility difficulties. Census data shows 19 percent of R.I.ers age 65+ with a self-reported ambulatory difficulty making them more prone to falls in housing with outside stairs for access, stairs inside multi-level homes and outdated bathrooms. As the older population continues to grow, the number with ambulatory difficulties needing walkers and wheelchairs will increase along with the need for more accessible housing. There is also a critical need for accessible housing for families with younger persons and adults with mobility disabilities.

Many older households wish to relocate to smaller homes or move to rental units with accessibility features needed now or to prepare for “age in place.” However, finding accessible and affordable homes/apartments is a major challenge. Data from The National Low-Income Housing Coalition¹ shows that 43% of extremely low-income R.I. renters are seniors and 18% are persons with disabilities. There are huge wait lists for subsidized housing units and especially for those with accessible features. Information from RI Housing on housing units they funded in the last five years showed only out of units were for elderly/disabled housing and many had limited accessible units. As the state plans to invest millions of dollars to develop affordable housing for low and moderate-income persons it is critical that the need for accessible housing and for older adults and persons with disabilities is addressed. We understand some are encouraging creation of a Commission to Study the issue. However, we urge you to consider the provisions in each of these bills, to work with the sponsors, RI Housing, the Department of Housing and other relevant organizations to pass a bill in 2025 that allows the state to move forward to expand accessible housing options and not to “kick the can down the road” which will only increase costs in the long run.

1. <https://nlihc.org/housing-needs-by-state/rhode-island>