

Testimony in support of H7942 and H7943

Maureen Maigret, Policy Advisor

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**Senior Agenda
Coalition of RI**

70 Bath Street
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TO: The Honorable Raymond A. Hull, Chairman
Members
House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing

FROM: Maureen Maigret, Policy Advisor
Senior Agenda Coalition of Rhode Island

RE: Support for H7942 and H7943

The Senior Agenda Coalition of Rhode Island is pleased to support **H7942** by Representatives Ackerman and Shekarchi and **H7943** by Representatives Baginski and Potter. The Senior Agenda Coalition of Rhode Island is a non-profit organization that works to improve the quality of life for older Rhode Islanders both those living in their own homes and the community and those residing in nursing homes. The deepening housing crisis impacts all our families including our older householders. We commend Speaker Shekarchi for his commitment to address the state's housing crisis and the sponsors of these bills and all the others that have been introduced to address what is a complex and critical issue.

Why is housing an important issue for our older population?

Housing costs are the 2nd largest expense for older adults living in the community. 52% of RI older renters pay 30% or more of income on housing as do 33% of home owners (ACS 2020 5yr Table S0103.) The 2021 Elder Index created by the University of Massachusetts Gerontology Institute (ElderIndex.org) shows housing costs for a single renter in RI @ \$949/month and they would need almost \$38,000 to meet basic living expenses. Yet, 27% of RI older households have income less than \$25,000 (ACS 2019 table B19037.)

The pandemic and rapidly rising costs for basic needs including housing has exacerbated the economic insecurity of many older adults and highlights the urgent need to address housing issues for this population. By promoting development of more Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) in our municipalities, **H7942** would expand housing options for older adults. As our state population ages, there will be a demand for smaller, more affordable homes by this age group. ADU's make use of existing infrastructure and can be good alternatives to provide housing for an older loved one needing care who still wants some independence but feels secure living near a loved one or to provide housing for a caregiver to live close by. An older person may also wish to create an ADU for themselves and rent out their larger home which would contribute to our housing supply. I have focused on ADU's advantages for older persons but they can be an option for people of all ages.

H7943 calls for assessing vacant school and municipal buildings for feasibility for repurposing into affordable housing which makes sense. I would suggest that this also be done for vacant state buildings and other structures such as vacant nursing homes if this is not already being done.

In addition to being a Policy Advisor for the Senior Agenda Coalition, I am also a member of the Housing Resources Commission representing the senior population. I urge you to recommend passage of these bills and thank you for your support and attention given to legislation and others that address the state's housing crisis. Thank you.