

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### RI Housing Organizations Share Policy Recommendations with State

Homes RI, a coalition of organizations focused on housing in Rhode Island, collaborated on a set of policy recommendations that they agree state leaders must act on to keep people in their homes, stop the spread of the virus and prepare for housing needs in the aftermath of the pandemic. The partnership is thankful for the Governor's decisive actions in protecting residents during the pandemic. They recommend the following actions to bolster those efforts:

**Protect Rhode Islanders from eviction, foreclosures, and utility shut-offs:** Ensuring that people who currently have a place to live can remain in their homes with uninterrupted access to vital utilities is a critical public health measure. We request a statewide directive that would protect tenants and homeowners from evictions, foreclosures, and utility shut offs for a minimum of 120 days after the emergency is declared over.

**Ensure financial support for tenants and property owners:** Rent and mortgage assistance should be a top priority for state and federal disaster relief funds so that tenants and homeowners can be protected from homelessness. As tenants fall behind on rent due to reduced or lost incomes, landlords and property owners need additional resources during this time to maintain their buildings, pay for increased and unexpected costs due to COVID-19, and cover expenses like mortgages and property taxes. This is particularly important to protect Rhode Island's inventory of over 37,000 long-term affordable homes for low and moderate-income residents. We ask that available federal resources be fast-tracked for rent, mortgage, and operations assistance for tenants and property owners and that the State consider its own financial package to supplement available federal funds for housing.

**Support for people experiencing homelessness:** People experiencing homelessness already face numerous barriers to accessing quality healthcare and are at enormous risk during this pandemic. It is imperative that the state act to protect the health, safety, and ability to access services for people experiencing homelessness. While our state's shelter providers are taking every precaution at their disposal to mitigate risks of transmission, congregate settings are in direct conflict with current public health protocols. We request financial resources to ensure that people who are homeless are able to safely isolate and quarantine, and that critical amenities such as toilets, handwashing, and charging stations are made publicly accessible in communities across Rhode Island. We also request a state directive to municipalities to suspend ordinances which impact people experiencing homelessness (e.g., sleeping or camping outside) and to designate safe parking zones for people living in their cars.

**Sustained support for affordable homes:** While we are all focused on this immediate public health crisis, it is more important than ever that we act to address Rhode Island's severe housing shortage and cost-burden to residents. Housing is healthcare. We urge the Administration and General Assembly to work together to preserve the proposed housing bond and dedicated annual funding stream to build safe, healthy long-term affordable homes. We call on lawmakers to take action to eliminate unnecessary barriers to accessing secure housing, including, but not limited to, an end to housing discrimination based on a tenant's source of income or eviction history. Ensuring sustained investments in housing, particularly for low and no-income Rhode Islanders, will only strengthen our ability to recover from this public health crisis, and ensure resiliency for the next emergency that hits us.

Homes RI is a coalition of organizations working together to increase the supply of safe, healthy and affordable homes throughout Rhode Island. We believe Rhode Island can and should be a state where all residents are able to live in safe, healthy and sustainable homes in thriving communities.

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