



**PRESS RELEASE
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**State Leaders, Advocates Call for Increased Investments in
Housing Using American Rescue Plan Funds**

PROVIDENCE, RI - On Thursday, May 19, 2022, at 3:00 p.m., housing advocates, community leaders, and State Legislators, including RI House Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi, gathered at the State House to call for increased investments that will support building, preserving, and removing barriers to accessing safe, healthy and affordable homes for Rhode Islanders.

“Housing has been my top priority since becoming Speaker. This legislative session, I’ve introduced an 11-bill package of legislation to look at the myriad rules and regulations that make building more affordable housing a challenge, streamline efforts so that good work isn’t happening in a vacuum, and hold policy-makers accountable,” said Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi.

Representative Speakman, who chairs the Low and Moderate Income Housing Act Commission, states that, “Through the work of the LMI Commission, we have learned that Rhode Island needs to add multiple tools to our housing policy toolbox –from accessory dwelling units to multi-family homes to more flexible zoning costs– to help communities reach their 10 percent commitment, and most importantly, to ensure that every Rhode Islander has access to a safe, comfortable, affordable home.”

Other speakers highlighted Homes RI’s comprehensive and community informed recommendations for increasing investments in affordable homes and housing stability using \$500 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. Governor Dan McKee’s Fiscal Year 2023 budget proposal currently includes an investment of \$250 million in affordable homes and housing stabilization using ARPA funds - \$29 million of which has already been approved by the General Assembly in January of this year as part of an amended FY22 budget. Advocates and State Leaders elevated the need for building on the foundation that the Governor’s proposal provides to meet the vast and critical need for housing investments in communities across Rhode Island.

"We know that not being able to afford a safe home impacts all members of a family unit, as well as the community," said Representative Karen Alzate, who chairs the Legislative Black and Latino Caucus. "With the challenges that our state is facing, we need to ensure that we support our communities in many ways, and the first step is in being able to provide housing for them."

The event was hosted by Homes RI, a statewide, multi-sector coalition of organizations dedicated to increasing and preserving the supply of safe, healthy and affordable homes in Rhode Island. There are more than 90 organizations and over 200 individuals engaged in Homes RI. Homes RI is coordinated by the Housing Network of Rhode Island. The Housing Network of Rhode Island is the State's membership association of 17 nonprofit community development agencies across Rhode Island. HNRI members have created more than 15,000 affordable homes and are responsible for nearly 70% of the production and preservation of affordable homes made possible by funding from the 2006, 2012, and 2016 affordable housing bonds.

"The Housing Network of Rhode Island members have over 2,000 affordable units in our three-year development forecast and with adequate investments we can break ground and produce much needed affordable homes," stated Jennifer Hawkins, Executive Director of ONE Neighborhood Builders. "We are prepared to do our part to meet the needs of low-income Rhode Islanders, provided a financial commitment that matches the scale of our housing challenges."

Devra Levy, Community Organizer for the Childhood Lead Action Project, elevates the need for increased funding to address aging homes and repair old infrastructure, including lead hazard remediation. "In Rhode Island we have some excellent housing safety laws on the books, but we lack the investments and commitments needed to promote and enforce them," Levy states. "It is essential to provide the necessary resources for cities and towns to make sure State laws are followed and to ensure homeowners, landlords, and tenants are aware of their rights and responsibilities."

Thursday's speaking program was held to demonstrate the support of State and local leaders on the importance of decent and affordable homes as a foundation for a stronger Rhode Island.

"Safe, healthy, affordable homes are essential to Rhode Islanders' wellbeing and prosperity. Over the last year, United Way of RI has received just over 109,000 calls to our 211 call center from Rhode Islanders across the state in need of housing assistance," said Larry Warner, Chief Impact & Equity Officer of United Way Rhode Island. "Many households are finding themselves with nowhere to go. We are calling on our State leaders to maximize investments in affordable homes now to increase housing options in every community, specifically for our lowest income residents and communities of color."

Speakers included:

- RI House Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi (D - District 23, Warwick)
- RI Senator Frank Lombardo III (D - District 25, Johnston)
- RI Representative June Speakman (D - District 68, Bristol, Warren)
- RI Representative Karen Alzate (D - District 60, Pawtucket)
- Jennifer Hawkins, ONE Neighborhood Builders
- Ehren Hunt, Tri-County Community Action Agency

- Jessica Vega, West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation
- Devra Levy, Childhood Lead Action Project
- Larry Warner, United Way of Rhode Island

About Homes RI

Our homes and neighborhoods shape our lives. Our home and surrounding environment matters to our health, wellbeing, and economic stability. When we each live in a safe, healthy, and affordable home, we thrive. When our neighbors live in a safe, healthy, and affordable home, our neighborhood and community thrives.

Homes RI is a cross-sector coalition of organizations working together to increase and preserve 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. Learn more at www.homesri.org.

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