



January 30, 2023

Governor Dan J. McKee
State of Rhode Island

Sent via email

Dear Governor McKee:

In early 2021, Rhode Island received federal funding – a total of \$352 million – to establish a statewide Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) in response to the coronavirus pandemic. *Rent Relief RI* (RRRI) became one of more than 500 Treasury-funded state and local ERAP programs across the U.S. and Tribal Nations, with a timeline for implementation that was unprecedented for a program of its scale.

We value the Administration’s continued attention to critical housing issues impacting Rhode Islanders. As you know, ERAP funds were appropriated by two separate Congressional COVID relief packages – the *Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021* (“ERA 1”) and the *American Rescue Plan Act* (“ERA 2”). The State currently has an estimated \$34 million in remaining ERA 2 funds which can be used to sustain ERA. **We are requesting that the Administration immediately obligate these funds to capitalize a permanent ERA program that will help preserve housing stability for low-income Rhode Islanders who experience a short-term financial crisis.** This is the intended use for these funds, and the State can easily build on the success of *Rent Relief RI* with the existing programmatic infrastructure that RRRI created.

During a 16-month period (May 2021 to September 2022), *Rent Relief RI* served more than 40,000 of Rhode Island’s lowest-income households and disbursed nearly \$275 million in assistance for rent, utilities, and moving costs (90% of which went directly to landlords on behalf of their tenants). Throughout its operation, *Rent Relief RI* incorporated nationally recognized best practices related to assistance distribution, and as a result, effectively reached tens of thousands of economically vulnerable Rhode Islanders. Tenants and landlords alike have reflected that the program provided an essential lifeline for health and housing stability during and after the worst months of the pandemic.

The need for a continuation of a statewide ERA program is highly visible and widely evident. Since the program’s closure, eviction complaints for nonpayment of rent have begun to

increase¹, and the number of unsheltered people living outdoors or in cars increased by 30% between October 2021 and 2022². In the first two weeks of January 2023, over 300 people were recorded as unsheltered³.

Nationally, there is growing bipartisan support for the implementation of permanent state and local ERA programs. If we fund a permanent ERA program, Rhode Island will not be an outlier compared to our neighbors, but we will be a national leader.

Long-term, we must continue to focus on building and preserving more long-term affordable homes, increase wages, and strengthen essential safety net programs, including permanent rental subsidies. As the State works on its long overdue comprehensive housing plan, we must simultaneously and proactively prevent evictions and displacement that are driving rising homelessness and furthering economic instability in Rhode Island.

We appreciate the Administration and General Assembly's deep commitment to housing issues. As a community of practitioners and advocates across many fields, we remain ready to help deploy both immediate and long-term effective solutions to address the housing needs of Rhode Islanders.

Respectfully,

Homes RI

Organizations

Above the Line RI
Alliance to Mobilize Our Resistance (AMOR)
Amos House
Barbara Sokoloff Associates
Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island
Center for Justice
Childhood Lead Action Project
Church Community Housing Corporation
Community Care Alliance
Community Health Institute of Rhode Island
Community Housing Land Trust of RI
Crossroads Rhode Island
DARE – Direct Action for Rights and Equality
Dorcas International Institute of RI
Foster Forward
George Wiley Center
Haus of Codec
Help the Homeless RI
Housing Network of Rhode Island
HousingWorks RI at RWU

¹ <https://www.rihousing.com/evictions-dashboard/>

² 2022 *State of Homelessness*, RI Coalition to End Homelessness. November 14 2022. <https://www.rihomeless.org/soh>

³ RI Coalition to End Homelessness

Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty
Jonnycake Center for Hope
LISC Rhode Island
National Association of Social Workers - Rhode Island Chapter
Neighbors Helping Neighbors
NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley
Ocean State Center for Independent Living
Omni Development Corporation
ONE | Neighborhood Builders
Pawtucket Central Falls Development Corporation
Pawtucket Foundation
Pawtucket Housing Authority
Pawtucket Housing, Inc.
The Pro Bono Collaborative at RWU School of Law
Project Weber / RENEW
Protect Our Healthcare Coalition
RAMP – Real Access Motivates Progress
Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families
Rhode Island Community Action Association
Rhode Island Homeless Advocacy Project
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
Rhode Island Working Families Party
Sojourner House
SouthCoast Fair Housing
Westbay Community Action
West Broadway Neighborhood Association
West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation
Women’s Resource Center
The Womxn Project
United Way of RI

Individuals

Bob Plain, Jamestown
Judy Jones, Newport
Linda Katz, Providence
Shalissa Coutoulakis, Pawtucket
Stephen Antoni, Richmond
Stephen Kearns, Lincoln
Susan Aitcheson, East Greenwich
Wendy Sanchez, Providence