



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

ONE UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

Testimony Re: House Bill 5749
House Housing and Municipal Government Committee
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Stephanie Geller, Deputy Director

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to thank Representative Speakman for sponsoring this legislation and thank Representatives Morales, Henriess, Alzate, Felix, Giraldo, Potter, Cruz, Tanzi, and Stewart for co-sponsoring. This bill would help qualified nonprofit organizations, such as Community Development Corporations and nonprofit developers, purchase multi-family properties – those with five or more units -- at market rate to develop for affordable housing. These nonprofits would have the right of first refusal, ensuring that mission-driven, Rhode Island-based nonprofit housing providers are prioritized.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT speaks out about the importance of affordable housing because we know that children who live in families with housing cost burdens often live in low-quality and overcrowded housing and move frequently, all of which have been linked to increased absenteeism, lower educational achievement, and increased risk of homelessness. In contrast, when children live in high-quality housing that is safe, affordable, and located in well-resourced, low-poverty neighborhoods, they do better in school and their parents report improved mental health. We also know that Rhode Island has an urgent housing shortage. The supply of housing is not keeping up with demand, and the cost of housing is outpacing wages.

This legislation would help mission-driven, community-based nonprofit housing providers purchase existing multi-family properties and increase and preserve affordable housing in communities across Rhode Island. Buildings that might otherwise be sold for market-rate, luxury residential or commercial use could be developed into long-term affordable homes or community spaces.

Thank you for the leadership that the General Assembly has shown in tackling the many complex issues that affect families' ability to secure safe and affordable housing and thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.