



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**RIHousing, RI Office of Innovation Narrow the Digital Divide through Partnership  
with T-Mobile and Santander Bank**

*Unique public-private pilot program helps close gap for the 40% of tenants without internet  
access at home*

**Providence, RI** – At an event held yesterday, Lieutenant Governor Dan McKee, T-Mobile and Santander Bank joined RIHousing and the Rhode Island Office of Innovation to launch a pilot program to connect residents to affordable, in-home broadband internet access. Known as ConnectRI, the program, aimed at eliminating the digital divide among Rhode Islanders, is a partnership between RIHousing, the state’s Office of Innovation, T-Mobile, Santander Bank, Providence Public Library and local public housing authorities.

“In today’s increasingly technological society, too many people are being left behind when it comes to internet access,” said Claribel Shavers, RIHousing’s Director of Leased Housing & Rental Services. “Internet is now a necessity for all, from school-age kids needing to do their homework, to adults looking to gain employment. We are thrilled to partner with T-Mobile and Santander Bank to help our families remain competitive in today’s technology-driven environment by providing internet access in the home.”

This public-private digital inclusion partnership is part of the national ConnectHome initiative launched by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). ConnectHome is a collaboration between communities, the private sector and the federal government to expand high-speed internet access to more families across the country. The initiative brings affordable broadband access, technical training, digital literacy programs and electronic devices to thousands of households living in HUD-assisted housing.

Over 40 percent of residents receiving rental assistance through RIHousing do not have access to in-home internet. As a result, they need to rely on costly data plans, libraries, or other locations to access basic needs like SNAP benefits, medical insurance, and other programs—as well as engage in online learning opportunities, write job applications, or even communicate with their children’s schools.

“Closing the digital divide is a critical equity and economic development issue for the state. How we meet large-scale challenges like this will determine our future,” said Daniela Fairchild, Director of the RI Office of Innovation. “ConnectRI is one bold solution to empower Rhode Islanders to take advantage of new opportunities and to compete in the knowledge economy. We need to keep the momentum going and continue to support innovative and integrated solutions like ConnectRI.”

Participants in the program were selected via a random lottery drawing of Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) tenants who identified as not having internet access in the home. Each will receive free T-Mobile tablets as well as two years of 4G (mobile broadband), unlimited internet service underwritten by Santander Bank. After two years, residents can choose to continue their internet plan at only \$10/month. Participants were invited to the launch announcement, which was followed by an afternoon-long training session for residents on how to use the tablets, access the educational and financial planning apps pre-loaded onto the devices, and troubleshoot any issues.

Throughout the duration of the two-year pilot program, participants will complete regular surveys to assess the impact of internet access on employment, education, and quality of life. Additional trainings by ConnectHome and RIHousing will also be offered throughout the program.

### **About RIHousing**

RIHousing works to ensure that all people who live in Rhode Island can afford a healthy, attractive home that meets their needs. RIHousing provides loans, grants, education and assistance to help Rhode Islanders find, rent, buy, build and keep a good home. Created by the General Assembly in 1973, RIHousing is a self-sustaining corporation and receives no state funding for operations. For more information regarding RIHousing, visit [www.RIHousing.com](http://www.RIHousing.com) or follow us @RIHousing on Facebook and Twitter.

### **About the Rhode Island Office of Innovation**

The Rhode Island Office of Innovation is a governor’s initiative, launched in January 2016, to support and positively impact public systems in Rhode Island. The Office works across sectors, supporting public housing authorities, K–12 school districts, higher education institutions, libraries, and state agencies in piloting and sustaining projects that better serve the collective need of all Rhode Islanders. Learn more at <http://innovate.ri.gov> or on social media @InnovateRI.

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