



MEMO

To: RIHousing Board of Commissioners Intergovernmental Relations Committee
From: Amy Rainone
Date: March 18, 2021
Subject: RIHousing 2021 Legislative Priorities

2020 State Legislative Wrap-Up:

The 2020 General Assembly session began with Governor Raimondo's introduction of a proposed FY2021 budget that included significant housing related priorities including a proposed \$25 million Housing bond, the creation of a dedicated funding stream for housing production and preservation, elimination of the double taxation of affordable housing through the conveyance tax, the addition of two non-voting members to RIHousing's Board of Commissioners and a restructuring of the RI Housing Resources Commission. That proposed budget also included a RIHousing scoop of \$1.1 million.

The pandemic cut the General Assembly session short and as a result very few bills were passed. It also delayed passage of the FY2021 budget until December of 2020. The final FY2021 "skinny" budget stripped out most policy changes including all of the housing related priorities with the exception of the Housing bond which was increased to \$65 million (*the Housing Bond passed in a special election on March 2 with 66% approval*). The RIHousing scoop was also eliminated.

2021 State Leadership Changes:

The 2020 election brought significant changes to the RI General Assembly and the Governor's office. In the Senate, the election resulted in a political shift to the left with the election of eight new members, most of them part of a group of progressive candidates. Six of the Senate's ten committees have new leadership this session., including the important Senate Finance and Judiciary Committees.

In the House, Speaker Mattiello lost his re-election bid, resulting in a new leadership team: Speaker Joseph Shekarchi and Majority Leader Christopher Blazejewski. Speaker Shekarchi has restructured the House Committees including establishment of a Committee on Municipal Government and Housing. Earlier this month, the Speaker announced a package of seven housing related bills, indicating that housing would be a priority for the Chamber this year. The package includes the Source of Income Discrimination bill, the establishment of two commissions to look at barriers to housing development



and ways to improve the State's Low and Moderate Income Housing Act (RIHousing has a seat on each), and the creation of a Deputy Secretary for Commerce and Housing position within the Executive Office of Commerce.

At the federal level, President Biden nominated Governor Raimondo to be his Secretary of Commerce. On March 2, Governor Raimondo was confirmed as Commerce Secretary by the Senate, and Lieutenant Governor Dan McKee was sworn in as Governor. Governor McKee is still building his team, however many Directors and staff from the Raimondo administration remain in place.

2021 State Legislative Priorities

Housing issues are once again receiving a great deal of attention at the General Assembly this year. **Attached is a table showing RIHousing's current legislative priorities.** Generally, priority bills are those that directly impact RIHousing's operations or our ability to carry out our mission.

In addition, we are closely tracking a number of other housing related bills which RIHousing may be called upon to provide feedback on. These include:

COVID Related bills:

- Eviction/Foreclosure Moratorium: [H5309](#) (Rep Diaz) / [S183](#) (Sen Euer)
- Residential Rent and Mortgage Cancellation Act: [H6073](#) (Rep Henries)

Renter Related bills:

- Sealing records in evictions resolved in favor of tenant: [H5391](#) (Rep Alzate)/ [S528](#) (Sen Mack)
- Requiring Certificate of rental suitability: [H5389](#) (Rep Alzate)/ [S510](#) (Sen Euer)

Development Related bills:

- Increasing fee-in-lieu of developing affordable units in inclusionary zoning developments: [H5695](#) (Rep McEntee)/ [S524](#) (Sen Kallman)
- Requiring affordable units as part of tax stabilization agreements: [S477](#) (Sen Kallman)
- Creation of Housing Jobs Department: [S219](#) (Sen Acosta)/ [H6074](#) (Rep Henries)
- Prohibiting single-family residential zoning in certain areas: [H6093](#) (Rep Brianna Henries)

Other bills:

- Pay for Success initiative: [H5788](#) (Rep Cassar)/[S371](#) (Sen Miller):
- Creation of Deputy Secretary of Commerce & Housing: [H5951](#) (Rep Shekarchi)
- First-Time Homebuyers Savings Account: [H5536](#) (Rep Tobon)/ [S478](#) (Sen Pearson)



2021 Federal Legislative Priorities:

Over the past year, multiple COVID relief bills have been passed by Congress, funneling billions of dollars to Rhode Island, including hundreds of millions of dollars in housing assistance. RIHousing has assisted the State in administering some of these resources and is preparing to launch major new federally funded rent and mortgage assistance programs.

In the year ahead our federal legislative priorities will be divided between coordinating with the state and the federal delegation on the implementation of these new emergency assistance programs and our more traditional legislative priorities which include:

- **Supporting passage of the Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act** which would increase RIHousing's allocation of Housing Credits by 50% and make other important improvements to the program.
- **Maintaining the tax-exempt status of mortgage revenue bonds.**
- **Preserve and expand funding for key federal housing programs** including:
 - Home Investment Partnerships Program (HOME)
 - National Housing Trust Fund (HTF)
 - Capital Magnet Fund
 - Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP)
 - Project Based Section 8
- **Advocate for Performance Based Contract Administration (PBCA) of Section 8 developments to remain a state-level PHA responsibility.**
- **Urge the Administration to renew the FFB Risk Share Initiative.**
- **Support an infrastructure package that includes significant investments in the development and preservation of affordable homes.**

NCSHA's annual legislative conference will take place virtually this year from March 22-24. Carol Ventura and other key RIHousing staff will be meeting by video conference with our Delegation members during the conference to share with them RIHousing's federal legislative priorities.