

2025 -- S 0611 SUBSTITUTE A

LC001355/SUB A

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

A N A C T

RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES -- LOW AND MODERATE INCOME HOUSING

Introduced By: Senators Bissaillon, DiMario, Gu, and Murray

Date Introduced: March 06, 2025

Referred To: Senate Housing & Municipal Government

(Dept. of Housing)

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 45-53-10 of the General Laws in Chapter 45-53 entitled "Low and
2 Moderate Income Housing" is hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **45-53-10. Repurposing of vacant schools for affordable housing program.**

4 (a) There is hereby established the repurposing of school buildings for an affordable
5 housing program (the "program"). The program shall be administered by the secretary of housing
6 as set forth herein.

7 (b) The purpose of the program shall be to provide guidance and assistance in the
8 repurposing of vacant and unused school buildings as identified and existing as of July 1 of each
9 year, commencing October 1, 2022.

10 (c) The department of elementary and secondary education (the "department") shall,
11 commencing on October 1, 2022, on an annual basis, provide to the speaker of the house, the
12 president of the senate, and the secretary of housing a list of all school buildings that have been
13 abandoned or are no longer being used by a school district.

14 (d)(1) ~~In the case of a municipality that has less than ten percent (10%) low or moderate-~~
15 ~~income housing as defined in § 45-53-3, the municipality shall provide the department with a~~
16 ~~complete list of buildings abandoned or no longer being used by the school district for the purposes~~
17 ~~of conducting a feasibility assessment to repurpose the building as affordable housing. In the case~~
18 ~~of a municipality that has greater than ten percent (10%) low and moderate income housing as~~
19 ~~defined in § 45-53-3, the municipality may offer to the department a list of buildings abandoned or~~

1 ~~no longer being utilized by the school district by an affirmative vote of a majority of both the~~
2 ~~governing body of the school board and the municipality, and have voted to be willing to offer the~~
3 ~~former school building for a feasibility assessment for use by the program. In the case of buildings~~
4 ~~being abandoned or no longer used by a charter school that owns the school building in question,~~
5 ~~an affirmative vote of the governing body of the charter school and/or mayoral academy shall be~~
6 ~~required.~~ Each municipality shall provide the department with a complete list of buildings
7 abandoned or no longer being used by the school district for the purposes of conducting a feasibility
8 assessment to repurpose the building as affordable housing. The department shall also include and
9 identify in the list those school buildings that the department anticipates will become abandoned or
10 no longer used by a school district within the next six (6) months following the issuance of the list.

11 (2) The secretary of housing shall convene a task force comprised of the Rhode Island
12 housing and mortgage finance corporation, the department of environmental management, the
13 department of health, and a fire marshal to develop assessment criteria to conduct preliminary
14 assessments to determine if a building may be repurposed into affordable housing. Once the
15 preliminary assessment criteria are established, the department of housing shall conduct ~~an~~
16 ~~assessment~~ the assessments for each school on the vacant schools list, ~~in conjunction with a task~~
17 ~~force comprised of the Rhode Island housing and mortgage finance corporation, the department of~~
18 ~~environmental management, the department of health, a fire marshal, the local building inspector,~~
19 ~~and the local planning office, into its feasibility to be repurposed as affordable housing, and the~~
20 ~~anticipated costs of renovating the building for that intended purpose.~~

21 (3) If the department of housing finds that the assessed building meets the preliminary
22 assessment criteria, the department may, contingent upon program funding, facilitate a feasibility
23 study to determine the anticipated costs to repurpose the building for affordable housing. This
24 ~~assessment~~ feasibility study shall be completed within one hundred and ~~fifty (150)~~ eighty (180)
25 days after ~~being~~ the department of housing has been notified ~~by the task force~~ of the availability of
26 a vacant building ~~available~~ pursuant to this section.

27 (3)(4) Once a building is determined by the ~~task force~~ department of housing to be
28 appropriate for repurposing as affordable housing, through a completed feasibility study, the ~~office~~
29 ~~of housing and community development~~ department of housing, in collaboration with the respective
30 municipality, shall actively identify and may invite prospective developers to submit ~~an application~~
31 ~~to the program~~ proposals for redevelopment of the site through a competitive process, with the goal
32 of repurposing the building into affordable housing.

33 (e) The ~~office of housing and community development~~ department of housing shall
34 maintain on its website a separate page related to the repurposing of buildings for the affordable

1 housing program. This website shall contain a listing of all buildings for which a feasibility
2 assessment was conducted and the outcome of the assessment, including a general statement of the
3 condition of the property, an estimate of the types of renovations, if any, that must be performed to
4 the property, a copy of the feasibility ~~assessment~~ [study](#), and an estimate of the costs thereof.
5 Provided, it shall be made clear on the website that these are estimates to repurpose used buildings,
6 and that neither the state, the corporation, the division, the commission, or any instrumentality of
7 the state or of a municipality or school district shall be liable for any estimates that are incorrect.

8 (f) The ~~office of housing and community development shall~~ [department of housing may](#)
9 seek to assist and facilitate persons and developers who or that want to repurpose former buildings
10 as affordable housing. This assistance may include, but need not be limited to, technical and
11 financial assistance, all to assist in the repurposing of the school building.

12 (g) The Rhode Island department of ~~education~~ [housing](#) shall promulgate rules and
13 regulations for the implementation and enforcement of this section.

14 (h) The secretary of housing shall provide an annual report on or before December 31,
15 commencing with calendar year 2023, including, but not limited to, the number of schools that are
16 vacant and include a status report of any development and/or feasibility to repurpose a vacant
17 building.

18 (i) As used herein, the term “affordable housing” means housing that meets the definition
19 for low- or moderate-income housing in § 45-53-3.

20 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
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RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES -- LOW AND MODERATE INCOME HOUSING

1 This act would clarify roles and regulatory authority for the administration of the program
2 involving the repurposing of vacant schools for housing. It would also extend the deadline for
3 conducting feasibility studies and expand access to this program to all municipalities.

4 This act would take effect upon passage.

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