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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- REHABILITATION BUILDING AND FIRE
CODE FOR EXISTING BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

Introduced By: Representatives Place, Newberry, Nardone, Roberts, Quattrocchi,
Hopkins, Chippendale, and Fascia
Date Introduced: January 16, 2026

Referred To: House Municipal Government & Housing

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Sections 23-29.1-1 and 23-29.1-3 of the General Laws in Chapter 23-29.1
2 entitled "Rehabilitation Building and Fire Code for Existing Buildings and Structures" are hereby
3 amended to read as follows:

4 **23-29.1-1. Legislative findings and purpose.**

5 The general assembly finds and declares:

6 (1) That there are throughout Rhode Island existing buildings and structures that are vacant
7 or partially vacant and/or underutilized because rehabilitation of such buildings and structures to
8 conform to the requirements for new structures under building and fire safety codes, is prohibitively
9 expensive or impractical;

10 (2) That buildings and structures that are vacant or partially vacant constitute a public
11 safety threat because of a lack of occupancy and a lack of investment in modernization and
12 maintenance;

13 (3) That the presence of vacant and or partially vacant buildings and structures contributes
14 to blight and or to the loss of economic viability of traditional city, town or village centers;

15 (4) That reinvestment in existing buildings and structures will strengthen local tax bases
16 and provide employment opportunities in construction and building trades;

17 (5) That it is the purpose of this chapter to provide a code and regulations for repairing,
18 rehabilitating, altering, improving, adding to and changing the use of existing buildings and

1 structures in a manner that assures the health, welfare and safety of occupants and that facilitates
2 designing improvements to existing buildings and structures to the code in an optimum manner
3 with a minimum need to for variances; ~~and~~

4 (6) That it is ~~further~~ the purpose of this chapter to provide a single uniform, statewide,
5 harmonious rehabilitation building code with building code and fire safety code elements
6 applicable to existing buildings and structures; ~~and~~ and

7 (7) That it is further the purpose of this chapter to encourage the continued use and reuse
8 of existing buildings and structures.

9 **23-29.1-3. Content, adoption, and administration of the rehabilitation building code**
10 **for existing buildings and structures.**

11 (a) Content. The rehabilitation building and fire code for existing buildings and structures
12 shall have a building code element and a fire safety code element and shall make provisions for the
13 repair, renovation, alteration, reconstruction, and change of use of and additions to existing
14 buildings and structures. The code shall set forth standards for different types of uses; and for
15 mixed-use buildings and structures, each portion of the building or structure shall be separately
16 classified as to use. The standards shall include, but not be limited to, standards for building; for
17 load bearing and structural elements; for plumbing, electrical, and mechanical systems; for fire
18 resistant walls and for fire suppression, fire alarm, and fire detection systems; for accessibility,
19 including accessibility for persons with disabilities, means of egress, elevators, escalators,
20 stairways, doors, ramps, fire alarms, floor surfaces, restrooms and corridors; for vents and
21 ventilation systems; and for historic buildings; provided however that such standards shall not
22 affect minimum standards for habitancy.

23 (b) Committee on drafting. There shall be a sixteen (16) member committee on drafting
24 the rehabilitation building and fire code for existing buildings and structures which shall have as
25 its members the ten (10) voting members of the joint committee, the state fire marshal, the state
26 building code commissioner, a representative of grow smart RI appointed by the chairperson of
27 grow smart RI, a representative of the Rhode Island builders association appointed by the president
28 of the Rhode Island builders association, a representative of the governor's commission on
29 disabilities, appointed by the chairperson of the governor's commission on disabilities, and an
30 historical preservation architect appointed by the executive director of the Rhode Island historical
31 preservation and heritage commission. The executive secretary of the joint committee shall serve
32 as secretary of the committee on drafting and be a nonvoting member of the committee. It shall be
33 the duty of the joint committee to develop a rehabilitation building and fire code for existing
34 buildings and structures, which shall have an element pertaining to fire safety and an element

1 pertaining to building standards, and to recommend said rehabilitation building and fire code for
2 consideration by the joint committee. The committee on drafting shall terminate upon an
3 affirmative vote of the joint committee to recommend the rehabilitation building and fire code for
4 existing buildings and structures for adoption by the building code standards committee and the
5 fire safety code board of appeal and review.

6 (c) Adoption. The building code element shall be effective upon adoption by the building
7 code standards committee pursuant to § 23-27.3-100.1.3 and the fire safety code element shall be
8 effective upon adoption by the fire safety code board of appeal and review pursuant to § 23-28.3-
9 3. Public hearings required by chapter 35 of title 42 for the adoption, amendment, or revision of the
10 rehabilitation building and fire code for existing buildings and structures and each of the elements
11 thereof shall be conducted by the joint committee.

12 (d) Administration. Except as set forth in this chapter, the building code element shall be
13 administered as a building code in accordance with the provisions of chapter 27.3 of this title, the
14 fire safety code element shall be administered as a fire safety code by the division of fire safety in
15 accordance with the provisions of chapter 28.2 of this title.

16 (e) Applicability to residential dwellings. Notwithstanding any provision of law, rule, or
17 regulation to the contrary, the rehabilitation building and fire code for existing buildings and
18 structures shall apply to existing residential dwellings for one, two (2), or three (3) families. Any
19 provision of law, rule, or regulation that expressly excludes one family, two (2) family, or three (3)
20 family residential dwellings from the applicability of the rehabilitation building and fire code is
21 hereby repealed.

22 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 HEALTH AND SAFETY -- REHABILITATION BUILDING AND FIRE
CODE FOR EXISTING BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

1 This act would expand the Rhode Island rehabilitation and fire code to include existing
2 one, two, and three family homes, removing their current exclusion and promoting the continued
3 use and reuse of existing residential buildings.

4 This act would take effect upon passage.

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