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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

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A N A C T

RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES -- RESTORING OPTIONS IN OCCUPANCY
MODELS (ROOM) ACT

Introduced By: Representatives Speakman, Diaz, Giraldo, and Cruz

Date Introduced: February 27, 2026

Referred To: House Municipal Government & Housing

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Legislative findings.

2 The general assembly finds and declares:

3 (1) Rhode Island is currently experiencing a housing availability and affordability crisis.

4 (2) Co-living, also known as Single Room Occupancy (SRO), is a residential property with
5 sleeping units that are independently rented and provide living and sleeping space, in which
6 residents share kitchen and/or bathroom facilities with residents of other units.

7 (3) Because of their smaller size and limited amenities, SROs historically have offered
8 rental housing at the lowest per-unit cost typically available on the private housing market.

9 (4) Starting in the early 20th century, local governments began adopting restrictive zoning
10 and other land use and building regulations that prohibited or made it impractical to build or operate
11 SROs, causing the numbers of such units to dramatically decrease.

12 (5) Today, many cities and counties either exclude co-living from most residential zones
13 or impose zoning and regulatory requirements that render the development or conversion of co-
14 living properties economically or physically infeasible.

15 (6) Co-living provides additional options for people who:

16 (i) Wish to lower their housing expenses by paying less for a smaller home;

17 (ii) Value shared community spaces that facilitate social connections;

18 (iii) Wish to trade space for location and the ability to live in a high-opportunity

1 neighborhood that would otherwise be out of reach; or

2 (iv) Want a more private alternative to having a roommate in a traditional rental.

3 (7) Recent studies show that in cities where co-living remains legal, monthly rents for co-
4 living average 40 percent lower than rents for studio apartments.

5 (8) While co-living is often associated with single-person households, adding smaller,
6 affordable units increases overall housing supply and triggers the economic process known as
7 filtering, in which additional supply reduces competition for larger family-sized homes and eases
8 pressure on rents across the market.

9 (9) Co-living is well suited for the conversion of office buildings, hotels and other
10 underutilized commercial properties to housing, because such conversions typically require less
11 plumbing and fixtures for kitchens and bathrooms, thus enabling the adaptive reuse of buildings
12 which would not be economically feasible to convert to standard apartments.

13 (10) Co-living may provide income-earning opportunities for property owners, furthering
14 housing affordability and economic mobility.

15 (11) Enabling the creation of co-living near downtowns, transit hubs, employment centers,
16 commercial areas and public amenities can increase walkability, shorten commutes, curtail sprawl,
17 limit growth of traffic and reduce the pressure to develop farmland and the natural environment.

18 SECTION 2. Title 45 of the General Laws entitled "TOWNS AND CITIES" is hereby
19 amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

20 CHAPTER 24.8

21 RESTORING OPTIONS IN OCCUPANCY MODELS (ROOM) ACT

22 **45-24.8-1. Short title.**

23 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as, the "Restoring Options in Occupancy
24 Models (ROOM) Act".

25 **45-24.8-2. Definitions.**

26 For the purposes of this chapter:

27 (1) "Co-living conversion" means the alteration of an existing building, or portion of a
28 building, for the purpose of creating two (2) or more sleeping units that have access to shared
29 kitchen and/or bathroom facilities, whether by reconfiguring interior space, changing the use or
30 occupancy classification, or adding sleeping units to a structure previously used for another
31 purpose.

32 (2) "Co-living occupancy agreement" means a written residential agreement that grants an
33 individual the exclusive right to occupy a sleeping unit in a co-living property and the shared right
34 to use common amenities and facilities in exchange for payment of rent. A co-living occupancy

1 agreement is a residential tenancy for purposes of chapter 18 of title 34, except to the extent that
2 this chapter provides different rules.

3 (3) “Co-living property” means a residential property that includes one or more sleeping
4 units that are independently rented and lockable, with residents sharing separate kitchen and/or
5 bathroom facilities with other sleeping units in the building. Municipalities may use other terms to
6 refer to co-living including, but not limited to, boarding house, congregate living facilities, group
7 home, lodging house, micro units, or single room occupancy. The term does not include a unit in a
8 hotel, motel, or other establishment in which more than half of the units are intended to be used for
9 transient accommodations.

10 (4) “Housing organization” means a trade or industry group consisting of local members
11 primarily engaged in the construction or management of housing units, a nonprofit organization
12 that provides or advocates for increased access or reduced barriers to housing, or a nonprofit
13 organization that is engaged in public policy research, education, litigation or outreach that includes
14 housing policy-related issues and advocacy.

15 (5) “Mixed use” means a type of development that combines residential uses with
16 commercial, entertainment, institutional, office, or other uses within a single building, parcel, or
17 development area.

18 (6) “Sleeping unit” means a room within a co-living property that is identified and intended
19 for sleeping purposes by a single occupant or two (2) occupants living as a household, whether or
20 not the room is currently occupied, leased, or in active use. A sleeping unit may include limited
21 food preparation or sanitation facilities, but typically does not contain both a full kitchen and a full
22 bathroom.

23 (7) “Transit station” means a stop on a municipal, tribal, intrastate, or interstate public
24 transportation system providing fixed route services.

25 **45-24.8-3. Co-living allowed by right.**

26 (a) Notwithstanding any provision to the contrary, a municipality shall allow co-living
27 properties as a permitted use by right on each parcel that is zoned for single family, multifamily,
28 commercial, or mixed use, or in any area where residential use is permitted.

29 (b) Approval of co-living properties shall not be subject to discretionary review, special
30 use permits, conditional use permits, planned unit developments, public hearing processes, or
31 variance requirements.

32 (c) A municipality shall allow as a permitted use co-living property with the number of
33 sleeping units consistent with the prescribed density standards of a lot zoned for multifamily,
34 commercial, or mixed use.

- 1 (d) A municipality shall not treat a sleeping unit within a co-living property as more than
2 one quarter (1/4) of a dwelling unit for purposes of calculating dwelling unit density.
- 3 (e) A municipality shall subject a co-living property to the least restrictive bulk, lot, and
4 height requirements applicable to any residential use within the same zoning district.
- 5 (f) A municipality shall not require any design or code standards for co-living properties
6 that are more restrictive than those required for other residential uses in the same zone.
- 7 (g) A municipality shall not require co-living properties to incorporate any aesthetic,
8 functional, or recreation facilities other than those required for other residential uses in the same
9 zone.
- 10 (h) An ordinance under this section shall not require co-living properties to:
- 11 (i) Adhere to room dimensional standards larger than those established by 24 CFR §
12 982.605, including dwelling unit size, sleeping unit size, and habitable space;
- 13 (ii) Provide a mix of unit sizes or number of bedrooms;
- 14 (iii) Provide off-street parking if the property is located within one-half (1/2) mile of a
15 transit station;
- 16 (iv) Provide more than one-quarter (1/4) off-street parking spaces per sleeping unit if
17 located beyond one-half (1/2) mile of a transit station; or
- 18 (v) Include other uses.
- 19 (i) A municipality shall not limit the people who may occupy a co-living property or
20 sleeping unit based on:
- 21 (i) Age;
- 22 (ii) Familial status;
- 23 (iii) Occupation;
- 24 (iv) Income or source of income;
- 25 (v) Disability status;
- 26 (vi) Relationship status; or
- 27 (vii) Whether the occupants are related to each other by a certain degree of affinity or
28 consanguinity.
- 29 (j) A municipality shall maintain and make publicly available, on at least an annual basis,
30 a record of new co-living properties and conversions, including:
- 31 (i) Each application for a permit to construct, convert, or operate a co-living property; and
32 (ii) The disposition of each application, including approval, denial, withdrawal, or pending
33 status, and the stated reason for any denial.
- 34 (k) This section supersedes and preempts any ordinance, resolution, regulation, policy, or

1 other local action that conflicts with or frustrates the purposes of this chapter. A municipality shall
2 not enforce any zoning or land-use restriction that is inconsistent with this section.

3 **45-24.8-4. Building code adjustments for single room occupancy.**

4 (a) A municipality shall not require a co-living property to include a commercial-grade
5 kitchen, notwithstanding the requirements of the state building code or the minimum standards for
6 basic equipment in the housing maintenance and occupancy code contained in § 45-24.3-7.

7 (b) A municipality shall not require a co-living property, or sleeping unit, to adhere to
8 standards beyond those contained within 24 CFR § 982.605.2 (minimum housing quality standard).

9 (c) A municipality shall not require a co-living conversion of more than eight (8) sleeping
10 units to incorporate operable windows in the sleeping units.

11 (d) This section supersedes and preempts any municipal or state building code requirement
12 that conflicts with or frustrates the purposes of this chapter. A municipality shall not adopt or
13 enforce any building code restriction that is inconsistent with this section.

14 **45-24.8-5. Application of exiting residential landlord and tenant laws.**

15 Occupants under co-living occupancy agreements are tenants for purposes of chapter 18 of
16 title 34.

17 **45-24.8-6. Co-living property usage.**

18 (a) A municipality shall not require any co-living property, regardless of number of
19 sleeping units, to construct, employ, operate or incorporate:

20 (i) Requirements for communal living space beyond the required bathroom and kitchen
21 facilities;

22 (ii) A specified ratio of sleeping units to kitchens or bathrooms;

23 (iii) Rules governing tenant conduct, communal behavior, quiet hours, or use of shared
24 spaces not applicable to any other residential tenancy;

25 (iv) Guest registration logs or visitor screening procedures not required of other residential
26 uses;

27 (v) Restrictions on the hours of ingress and egress for tenants or guests; or

28 (vi) The provision, coordination, or funding of social services, supportive services,
29 counseling, or case management.

30 (b) A municipality shall not require a co-living property containing eight (8) or fewer
31 sleeping units to employ, operate, or incorporate:

32 (i) A building manager who resides on the premises;

33 (ii) A video surveillance or monitoring system; or

34 (iii) A property management or maintenance plan beyond documentation required of any

1 other residential rental property of similar size.

2 (c) A municipality shall not impose any management, operational, or tenancy requirement
3 on a co-living property that is based on the presumed social, economic, or behavioral characteristics
4 of its residents, or that has the purpose or effect of discouraging the construction or operation of
5 co-living properties.

6 (d) A municipality shall not require a co-living property to participate in any affordable
7 housing program, inclusionary zoning program, or rent stabilization or control program, nor
8 condition approval upon compliance with any such plan.

9 (e) This chapter does not prohibit a municipality from imposing a limit on the number of
10 people who may occupy a dwelling or sleeping unit based on health and safety standards contained
11 in:

12 (1) The state building code;

13 (2) A fire code, to the extent that the code does not conflict with the provisions of this
14 chapter; or

15 (3) Local, state, or federal affordable housing program guidelines.

16 (f) Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit a municipality from enforcing
17 generally applicable health, safety, or building standards that are applied equally to all residential
18 uses.

19 **45-24.8-7. Applicability.**

20 (a) A municipality shall adopt or amend by ordinance and incorporate into their
21 development and zoning regulations the requirements of this chapter to take effect no later than
22 January 1, 2027, if it fails to do so, the requirements of this chapter shall prevail.

23 (b) Any municipal regulation that imposes requirements uniquely upon co-living
24 properties, or that has the effect of excluding co-living from otherwise permitted residential zones,
25 shall be presumed unreasonable and inconsistent with this chapter.

26 (c) Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to prohibit the enforcement of private
27 covenants, deed restrictions, homeowners' association rules, or other private agreements applicable
28 to a property.

29 (d) The provisions of this chapter do not apply to state or local regulations governing the
30 construction or operation of halfway housing, substance abuse rehabilitation centers, sober living,
31 re-entry housing, on- or off-campus university dormitories, homeless shelters, or dedicated housing
32 for the elderly or disabled.

33 (e) A co-living property lawfully existing on the effective date of this chapter is a
34 conforming use and may continue, be maintained, repaired, or reconstructed, notwithstanding any

1 contrary local ordinance or regulation.

2 **45-24.8-8. Enforcement.**

3 (a) An applicant, property owner or housing organization aggrieved by a municipal action
4 inconsistent with this chapter may seek declaratory or injunctive relief in the superior court and
5 shall be entitled to reasonable attorneys' fees and costs as a prevailing party.

6 (b) For purposes of this section, a party prevails if it obtains any form of judicial or
7 administrative relief, including a judgment on the merits, declaratory relief, injunctive relief, a
8 preliminary injunction, a consent decree, or if the litigation is a material contributing factor in
9 achieving the requested relief through voluntary action by the municipality.

10 **45-24.8-9. Severability.**

11 If any provision of this chapter or its application is held invalid, the invalidity does not
12 affect other provisions or applications of this chapter that can be given effect without the invalid
13 provision or application.

14 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

A N A C T

RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES -- RESTORING OPTIONS IN OCCUPANCY
MODELS (ROOM) ACT

1 This act would expand access to inherently affordable housing by re-legalizing co-
2 living/single-room occupancy (SRO) and shared dwelling models of many types. The act would
3 restore choice in housing options long constrained by exclusionary zoning, outdated building codes,
4 and discriminatory occupancy rules.

5 This act would take effect upon passage.

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