

2025 -- S 0611

LC001355

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 Bissailon, 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 determine the feasibility  
14 of a building to be repurposed into affordable housing. The department of housing shall conduct an  
15 assessment, in conjunction with ~~a task force comprised of the Rhode Island housing and mortgage~~  
16 ~~finance corporation, the department of environmental management, the department of health, a fire~~  
17 ~~marshal,~~ the local building inspector, and the local planning office, into its feasibility to be  
18 repurposed as affordable housing, and the anticipated costs of renovating the building for that  
19 intended purpose. This assessment shall be completed within one hundred and ~~fifty (150)~~ eighty  
20 (180) days after being notified by the ~~task force~~ department or an interested municipality of the  
21 availability of a vacant building available pursuant to this section.

22 (3) Once a building is determined by the ~~task force~~ department of housing to be appropriate  
23 for repurposing as affordable housing, the ~~office of housing and community development~~  
24 department of housing shall actively ~~identify and~~ invite prospective developers to submit an  
25 application to the program, with the goal of repurposing the building into affordable housing.

26 (e) The ~~office of housing and community development~~ department of housing shall  
27 maintain on its website a separate page related to the repurposing of buildings for the affordable  
28 housing program. This website shall contain a listing of all buildings for which a feasibility  
29 assessment was conducted and the outcome of the assessment, including a general statement of the  
30 condition of the property, an estimate of the types of renovations, if any, that must be performed to  
31 the property, a copy of the feasibility assessment, and an estimate of the costs thereof. Provided, it  
32 shall be made clear on the website that these are estimates to repurpose used buildings, and that  
33 neither the state, the corporation, the division, the commission, or any instrumentality of the state  
34 or of a municipality or school district shall be liable for any estimates that are incorrect.

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

5 (g) The Rhode Island department of ~~education~~ housing shall promulgate rules and  
6 regulations for the implementation and enforcement of this section.

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

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

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

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF  
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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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