



RHODE ISLAND

Department of Housing
317 Iron Horse Way, Suite 203
Providence, Rhode Island 02908

October 28, 2022

The Honorable Mayor Hopkins and Members of Cranston City Council
869 Park Avenue
Cranston, RI 02910

RE: Resolution of the City Council Opposing the Establishment of Pallet Housing Villages at the Pastore Center

Dear Mayor Hopkins and Members of the City Council,

I am writing today regarding the recently introduced resolution sponsored by councilmembers Reilly and Renzulli: “Opposing the Establishment of Pallet Housing Villages at the Pastore Center” and to correct the record regarding the work the McKee administration has undertaken to address our homelessness and housing issues for all Rhode Islanders, including residents of Cranston.

Far too many Rhode Islanders – in every city and town, including Cranston – are having trouble finding and securing the housing they need. This is especially true for vulnerable populations like seniors on fixed incomes and families experiencing homelessness. That’s why, the Governor proposed, and the General Assembly passed a once in a generation housing investment this past legislative session. We are actively investing a quarter of a billion dollars in affordable housing development, down payment assistance for first-time homebuyers, community revitalization, and in addressing and making homeless rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Housing is an issue in the City of Cranston, not just *other* communities. The City of Cranston is home to 81,252 Rhode Islanders that make up 31,362 families. Of these families, nearly half of renters and nearly one third of homeowners are cost burdened¹. In total, 10,616 households of the 31,362 households in Cranston are cost burdened, many of them seniors who are on fixed incomes and potentially a medical emergency away from facing homelessness. For example, during the 2019-2020 school year, 72 kids in the Cranston Public School system were homeless².

¹ 2022 Housing Factbook, HousingWorksRI at Roger Williams University

² Kids Count Factbook 2021

These numbers are unacceptable to our administration, and we hope that you share our concern in addressing the City's housing and homelessness issues. Ultimately, creating more housing across all income levels is the solution to homelessness. While being one of the largest municipalities in Rhode Island, Cranston only issued 50 new building permits in 2021³, almost exclusively for single family homes which tend to be unaffordable for most Cranston residents. Cranston's most recent housing plans have not been updated since 2010 while the housing stock has become increasingly unaffordable.

With regard to the proposed resolution sponsored by Councilmembers Reilly and Renzulli and referred to the Special Safety Services & Licenses Committee, we also want to clarify various factual inaccuracies. My office, along with the Governor's office, recently invited Mayor Hopkins and Chief of Staff Morretti to discuss innovative ideas such as rapidly deployable shelter units to address Cranston and the State's housing and homelessness issues. This is a shared responsibility that we have worked on with many cities and towns across the state to better address the increase in unhoused families living outside or in their cars throughout Cranston and the State.

On October 5, 2022, we had exploratory conversations with the Cranston's Mayor's Office regarding the Pastore Complex in an effort to collaboratively work together toward addressing homelessness. Pallet shelters are one of many types of rapidly deployable shelter solutions for the unhoused and we shared pictures of how these are implemented in places as diverse as Arkansas, Massachusetts, and Colorado. One of the advantages of setting up no more than 30 of these structures in one location is that individuals and families have their own 24-hour private space while still receiving necessary services.

At no point did we actively seek or plan to construct a village of pallet shelters or other shelter beds. Our only conversation was exploratory with the goal of being as transparent as possible and in the interest of obtaining input from Cranston's leadership team. While there are currently no plans to add shelter beds in Cranston, either through rapidly deployable structures or otherwise, we will continue to have exploratory discussions on how to address homelessness and housing in Cranston through innovative programs.

Additionally, we would like to clarify that the City of Cranston is by no means the sole location for addressing our homelessness and housing issues. In addition to lacking new affordable housing, despite the City's central location in our State, Cranston only provides 112 beds of the approximate 1,000 shelter beds funded by the State.

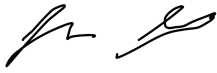
We are committed to working closely with the leaders of Rhode Island's cities and towns and local stakeholders to ensure that we invest in our communities and create housing opportunities for all Rhode Islanders. The State is addressing our housing issues by building new housing, improving the quality and safety of existing housing, and stabilizing households at risk of homelessness. However, this will not happen overnight

³ 2022 Housing Factbook, HousingWorksRI at Roger Williams University

and will require a commitment from our municipal leaders, including town councils throughout Rhode Island, to recognize and act with the urgency that meets the moment.

We welcome further discussion with you and your staff in the spirit of a collaborative effort to address the important issues set forth in this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Josh Saal', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Josh Saal
Secretary of Housing
State of Rhode Island