

20

Executive, Legislative & Regulatory Wins in 2021

The RI Association of REALTORS® (RIAR) Government Affairs Committee was eager to advocate for issues that are important to Rhode Island's real estate market following year one of the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are 20 steps forward from 2021 that will benefit RIAR members, their clients, and Rhode Island's housing market overall.



1. RENT RELIEF

Throughout 2021, RIAR staff was in contact with Rhode Island's federal delegation and advocated for rental assistance. Thanks to our members of Congress, Rhode Island received \$200 million from the federal Emergency Rental Assistance program to help eligible renters stay in their homes and pay for utilities, while helping small landlords make on time mortgage payments.

2. INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR STATUS

RIAR helped defeat legislation that would have amended the definition of "employee" in Rhode Island General Law, jeopardizing REALTOR® status as independent contractors.

3. INFRASTRUCTURE

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal passed by Congress and signed by President Biden sends more than \$2.5 billion of federal tax money to Rhode Island to repair roads and bridges, upgrade public transit and rail systems, address the climate crisis, and work to provide clean drinking water to all Rhode Islanders.

4. CONDOMINIUM RESALE CERTIFICATES

RIAR successfully championed legislation that limits condominium associations from charging a fee of more than \$125 for resale certificates.

5. HOUSING 'CZAR'

In 2021, House Speaker Joseph Shekarchi announced a new administrative position to create a centralized office to advocate for and oversee all of our state's housing initiatives.

6. FAIR HOUSING

NAR championed new fair housing legislation that would require real estate licensees to take an additional three hours of continuing education, focused on fair housing.

7. PROTECTED CLASSES

RIAR joined fair housing advocates in support of legislation that would amend the definition of sexual orientation and repeal an exemption that allowed for discrimination against prospective LGBTQ+ renters of owner-occupied, multi-family dwellings. The legislation also allows these cases of discrimination to be forwarded to the Superior Court and permits mediation prior to a case being heard.

8. PROPERTY TAX FAIRNESS

RIAR successfully advocated for legislation that prohibits cities and towns from performing spot assessments that change the assessment value of homes that have sold, except in accordance with their revaluation or update schedule.

9. SUSTAINABLE & SAFE HOUSING FOR SENIORS

RIAR put its support behind a budget item that establishes the livable home modification grant fund to provide individuals with severe disabilities, financial assistance to modify their homes.

10. RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY TAX INCENTIVE

RIAR supported legislation that would authorize municipalities to establish a property tax credit program in exchange for volunteer service by persons over the age of 60, up to \$1,500.



11. SHORELINE ACCESS

A special legislative commission formed to study coastal access rights in Rhode Island includes a member of the Rhode Island Association of REALTORS®.

12. LOW-INCOME PROPERTY TAX

RIAR successfully defeated legislation that would have increased the maximum tax for qualifying low-income housing based on the property's previous year's gross scheduled income.

13. LAND USE

RIAR is represented on the House Study Commission on Land Use which focuses on land preservation, production, development, housing, environment, and regulation.

14. LOW-AND MODERATE-INCOME HOUSING

RIAR is represented on the House Commission to Study Implementation of the Low- and Moderate-Income Housing Act.

15. TITLE INSURANCE

RIAR worked with other trade associations in successfully defeating legislation that would have provided that only Rhode Island attorneys could act as title insurance agents and determine insurability.

16. SMOKE/CO2 DETECTORS

Homeowners are now permitted to use wireless interconnecting detectors by utilizing a 10-year lithium battery as a power supply in any situation where a hard-wired alarm is called for. This applies to any situation requiring smoke and/or CO alarms.

17. HOMELESSNESS

The FY22 budget includes \$6 million to establish a 5-year pilot program that creates a funding stream for a pay-for-success supportive housing initiative for residents experiencing homelessness.

18. AFFORDABLE HOUSING

A program that will build or preserve more than 600 units of affordable housing in 13 communities through a \$31 million investment was announced by the state in 2021. This is one of many programs moving forward to address Rhode Island's housing shortage.

19. BROADBAND

An initial round of Community Development Block Grant Funding (CDBG) to support projects aimed at increasing internet access for low- and moderate-income households across Rhode Island has been established. Up to \$1.7 million of grant funding will be awarded for one year and non-profit organizations, public housing authorities, municipalities, faith-based organizations, and community housing development organizations are eligible to apply.

20. HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

In a 2021 special election, Rhode Island voters approved a \$65 million bond to increase housing construction and rehabilitation, community revitalization, property acquisition, and housing opportunities for Rhode Islanders.

Questions? Contact RIAR Government Affairs Director at 401.432.6959 or david@rirealtors.org.