TOWN OF CHARLESTOWN

June 11, 2020

Senator Dennis Algiere
Senator Elaine Morgan
Representative Blake Filippi

Re: H8015 – An Act Relating to Towns and Cities

Dear Sen. Algiere, Sen. Morgan & Rep. Filippi:

House Bill 8015 'An Act Relating to Towns and Cities' was recently introduced (see attached pdf). As proposed, the legislation would provide flexibility in local budgeting processes during declared states of emergency, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

The current declared emergency has disrupted the budget process for many communities that rely on financial town meeting and other referenda. These meetings are normally held in May or June each year but are not feasible under the restrictions on public gatherings. Several communities have used their own emergency powers to change the date of financial town meeting/referenda. However, current state law does not prescribe alternatives for these municipalities to approve the budget nor the automatic setting of the tax levy to support essential local services such as education and public safety. In some communities it will be necessary that alternative approval methods be employed which may not be allowed under existing state law and individual home-rule charters. Passage of H8015 would allow different approaches such as virtual platforms, mail ballots or 'drive-in' meetings for communities to approve these critical financial functions.

H8015 has been crafted in cooperation with the affected communities and the RI League of Cities & Towns. We believe this enabling legislation provides for continuation of operations during declared emergencies while addressing adequate safeguards and public protections. On that basis I would respectfully request your consideration and support of H8015. Please feel free to call or email should you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Mark Stankiewicz
Charlestown Town Administrator

Cc: Charlestown Town Council
        RI League of Cities & Towns