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Testimony on H-7835

Rhode Island House Corporations Committee

By:

Anne L. Fontaine, AIA

Chapter President

and

Taylor Hughes, AIA

Chapter Vice President

On behalf of:

AIA Rhode Island

A Chapter of

THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

April 02, 2026

*AIA Rhode Island advocates for the role of architecture and architects,
in elevating the quality of the built environment for all.*



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**Testimony in Opposition to H-7835:
“An Act Relating to Businesses and Professions – Architects”
House Corporations Committee
Hearing Date: April 02, 2026**

Chair Representative Joseph J. Solomon, Jr.,
First Vice Chair Representative William W. O'Brien,
Second Vice Chair Representative Justine A. Caldwell, and
Honorable Members of the Committee:

On behalf of **The American Institute of Architects Rhode Island (AIAri)**, we thank you for the opportunity to comment on **House Bill 7835**. The American Institute of Architects is the voice of the Architectural profession and a resource to its members in their service to society. AIA Rhode Island represents over 330 dues-paying members, and its main goal is to advocate for the role of architecture and architects, and to elevate the quality of the built environment for all. We respectfully submit testimony in **opposition** to this legislation.

1. **HB-7835 would undermine the integrity and quality of the Practice of Architecture in the State of Rhode Island by removing the requirement for majority ownership by licensed Architects.** To call oneself an Architect, an individual must pursue a degree at a program accredited by NAAB (the National Architectural Accrediting Board), then work in a supervised environment for a minimum of 3,740 hours in six areas of practice, while studying for and passing six complex and thorough exams. It's no small feat, and it is important to make sure that anyone practicing Architecture understands the vitality of upholding the health, safety, and welfare of that public. To outsiders, Architecture may seem only like drawing up homes and buildings, but there is a great burden that we carry to ensure that our buildings are not only protecting the lives of those who use them but enhancing them as well. There are ethical standards that Architects must uphold and practice by as well, that are vital to the integrity of the practice of Architecture. It is even more critical that those leading Architecture firms are not only aware of this code of conduct but embody it and ensure that their firms are constantly striving to uphold it. If Rhode Island moves towards decentralizing ownership away from such individuals, there could be consequences for the quality of buildings and places created, and thus endangering the health, safety, and welfare of the public.



2. **This amendment could allow influence over major building projects to move away from Architects towards unqualified individuals.** While this legislation protects “responsible control” and maintains that this control remains in the hands of licensed Architects, it allows them to be overpowered by other owners of the firm. Unqualified individuals may now call themselves majority owners of an Architecture firm never once having drafted a single plan or read a section of the Building Code, and because of the power they hold as majority owners, can influence the direction of projects. As stated previously, Architects are beholden to a code of ethics, and to uphold health, safety, and welfare of the public – but there’s often a self-imposed responsibility to go above and beyond that, and create projects that contribute to our communities, beautify our neighborhoods, and build a more sustainable future. For many people, Architecture is a career of passion and a calling, and it shows in the work they produce. It would be detrimental to the profession, to the built environment, and to the safety of our citizens to allow that to be overshadowed by firms focused on profitability and bottom lines, not their portfolios.

3. **This amendment would pave the way for outside corporations, including private equity firms, to buy up Rhode Island Architecture firms and forever change our identity.** Rhode Island, for such a small state, has an iconic and strong design community. If one were to scroll through AIAri’s website, they’d see that a majority of the Architecture firms represented are owned locally, and if one were to ask the Architects working at those firms, they’d cite the close connections they have with their bosses, coworkers, and other architectural and design professionals across Rhode Island, because they all live and work in the same communities. They all have close relationships with engineers, contractors, developers, and labor, and these ties ensure that other local companies are involved in the entire building process. It would be devastating to see large corporations from outside of the state purchase these firms and change that dynamic. The building industry is particularly sensitive to the changing economy, and a downturn could drive foundering firms into the arms of outside companies. Rhode Island ownership of these Architecture firms keeps these companies’ profits moving within the state’s economy, rather than exiting it, and means that these locally owned firms maintain physical offices within the state and employ Rhode Island residents, many of whom are graduates of local universities.

Conclusion

AIA Rhode Island respectfully opposes HB-7835, because it would:

- Decentralize ownership of Architecture firms away from licensed Architects

- Undermine the integrity of the practice, and put health, safety, and welfare of the public at risk by allowing unqualified individuals influence over the practice of Architecture
- Allow outside corporations to purchase Rhode Island Architecture firms and destabilize a close-knit industry that contributes positively to the state economy
- Erode local accountability by shifting decision making power away from professionals who live and work in the communities impacted by these projects
- Set a precedent that prioritizes financial interests over professional responsibility and public protection

At first glance, this bill seems to be a simplification in the process of registering Architecture firms. **We have grave concerns that it will have other consequences on Rhode Island's built environment and economy.** We urge the Committee to hold this bill for further study. Thank you for your consideration, and for your commitment to protecting the Architecture profession in Rhode Island.

AIA Rhode Island

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