

April 7, 2026

The Honorable Joseph J. Solomon, Jr. Chair
House Corporations Committee
Rhode Island House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: HOUSE BILL 7871 – AN ACT RELATING TO HIGHWAYS -- RELOCATION OF UTILITY SERVICES

Chair Solomon and Honorable Committee Members,

On behalf of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns and our 39 member municipalities, we write to express our support for House Bill 7871, which proposes amendments to Chapter 24-8.1 concerning the relocation of utility services. We thank Representative Alex Finkelman for advancing this important legislation.

This bill addresses a persistent municipal challenge: the financial responsibility for relocating municipally owned utility facilities as part of state highway projects. By ensuring full reimbursement for these relocations, the legislation appropriately acknowledges the critical role cities and towns play in owning and maintaining essential infrastructure, including water, sewer, and, in some cases, electrical systems.

Currently, municipalities may be required to bear some relocation costs for projects they do not control. This can create an unfunded or partially funded mandate, straining local budgets and placing additional pressure on taxpayers. House Bill 7871 corrects this imbalance and safeguards municipalities from being financially disadvantaged by state-initiated infrastructure improvements.

- The League supports this legislation for several reasons:
- **Fiscal Relief:** Eliminates unexpected capital expenditures, providing meaningful relief to municipal budgets.
- **Budget Stability:** Supports better long-term planning and prioritization of local infrastructure investments.
- **Reduced Local Burden:** Limits reliance on local revenue sources, including property taxes, to fund state-driven projects.
- **Project Efficiency:** Encourages timely completion of state transportation projects by reducing disputes over cost-sharing responsibilities.

Beyond financial considerations, the legislation strengthens coordination between state agencies and municipal departments. Utility relocations often require collaboration with local public works, water, and sewer authorities, and occasionally fire departments, particularly where water access and hydrant placement are involved. Full reimbursement facilitates this collaboration and helps projects proceed on schedule.

House Bill 7871 represents a practical and balanced approach, aligning financial responsibility with project authority while recognizing the essential role of municipal infrastructure in Rhode Island's transportation system.

We thank you for your attention and continued partnership with cities and towns across Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. R. Rossi".

Randy R. Rossi
Executive Director

Cc: Honorable Members of House Corporations Committee