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**Testimony on H-6149, Meals on Wheels of RI, Inc.
House Finance Committee
April 24, 2025**

Good afternoon, Chairperson Abney and members of the House Finance Committee. My name is Jocelyn Antonio. I currently reside in Cumberland and am providing this testimony in my personal capacity.

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 6149, which proposes the establishment of the Rhode Island Meals on Wheels Inc. Fund. This initiative would create a dedicated funding stream through a voluntary tax refund check-off, ensuring sustained support for Meals on Wheels of Rhode Island (MOWRI) and its vital services.

Public Health Significance of Meals on Wheels

Access to adequate nutrition is a fundamental determinant of health, particularly for older adults who are at increased risk for chronic diseases, social isolation, and loss of independence. MOWRI addresses these issues by providing not only nutritious meals but also regular wellness checks and social interaction, which are crucial for mental and physical well-being.

In 2024, MOWRI served over 3,700 Rhode Islanders, delivering more than 400,000 meals to homebound individuals across the state, including on Block Island. These services have been shown to reduce hospital readmissions and delay the need for long-term care, thereby decreasing healthcare costs and improving quality of life for recipients.
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Addressing Food Insecurity

Rhode Island faces a significant challenge with food insecurity. According to the 2024 Status Report on Hunger in Rhode Island, 38% of households experience food insecurity, with higher rates among communities of color. MOWRI plays a critical role in mitigating this issue by ensuring that vulnerable populations receive consistent, nutritious meals.
rifoodbank.org

Ensuring Sustainability

The proposed fund would provide MOWRI with a reliable source of funding, enabling the organization to plan and expand its services to meet growing demand. As the state's population ages and the cost of living increases, the need for programs like MOWRI will continue to rise. Establishing this fund is a proactive step toward ensuring that no Rhode Islander has to choose between food and other necessities.

Conclusion

House Bill 6149 represents a strategic investment in public health, social equity, and fiscal responsibility. By supporting this legislation, we can strengthen the safety net for our most vulnerable residents and promote healthier, more independent communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Jocelyn Antonio, MPH

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