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Representative Marvin Abney, Chair  
RI House Finance Committee

Dear Chairman Abney and esteemed members of the House Finance Committee,

I am writing in support of House Bill 5473, also known as the "Revenue for Rhode Island" bill, sponsored by Representative Karen Alzate.

I met a friend for coffee on Sunday on the East Side of Providence. She had a baby recently, and I sat with her and her son as we chatted, laughed, caught up, and shared with each other the fears we had surrounding raising children in this newer, darker version of the world. We talked about teaching our children to be good, kind people. I thought about the bags of food and supplies that my seven year old daughter suggested we make for the many homeless people who struggle to survive near our apartment. (We handed out all the bags we made, and she reminds me every day to buy supplies for more.) My friend and I encouraged each other to keep going. And then I headed for home.

As I was driving down Blackstone Blvd, I saw a house for sale. My partner and I are looking for a new apartment, and because I've had such a close eye on the rental market recently, I'm always intrigued by the price of houses I know I can't afford. I looked up the address online and saw that the house was for sale for 4.9 million dollars. Six bedrooms, five bathrooms, nearly 7,000 square feet. This was especially jarring, as I've been looking at apartments that cost \$2,000/month (a stretch for my budget) and max out at around 800 square feet. These apartments have painted-over outlets, windows that won't close, insects that make their homes in the cupboards. They are shoeboxes for \$24,000/year, plus extra for a parking spot, plus extra for a cat, utilities not included but you'd better keep the heat below 62 if you want to afford it in the winter.

The ocean between the upper class and what could laughably be described as the "middle class" in Rhode Island is vast, merciless, and nearly impassable. But it is nothing compared to the chasm that separates the upper class from those struggling the most in our state. Because when I saw that gorgeous 5 million dollar house for sale in Providence, all I could think of was how if you drive less than 10 minutes across the city over to Smith Street, you will find yourself standing where a homeless man died of exposure only three months ago while the richest in our state slept comfortably in their million dollar homes. While I slept with the heat turned low in my overpriced apartment, warm beneath

my blankets. Rico was not less deserving than the people who live on Blackstone Blvd, and he was not less deserving than me. He was not less of a person than any of us, but we are not the ones who died.

We should be ashamed of this disparity. We should be moved to give more when we have more, so that those who have nothing can stay alive. Because that is what it comes down to. There are some in Rhode Island who are living, and there are some in Rhode Island who are trying to stay alive. \$190 million in new revenue would save lives, while changing very little about the lives of those who it would be taxed from. Parks, roads, schools, shelters, affordable housing, bridges -- these things help us all. These things make Rhode Island a place where people can thrive -- all people. Not just those who can afford to live in six bedroom houses, and not just those who can afford to live in overpriced rundown apartments.

Every day, my child looks out the window of the car I'm lucky to afford as I navigate around potholes to bring her to her under-funded public school, and she sees the disparity in our city. She asks why no one in charge is doing anything about it. She asks how we can help. And we do help. We do everything we can, and now it's your turn. It is my job to keep that spark alive in her, and it is your job to show her that she lives in a world, in a state, that cares for its people. Don't let my daughter be the one to teach you how to care for people. Take ownership, show leadership, and teach her that you know how.

Respectfully,  
Kerstyn Leigh