

To Chairman Abney and Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Merissa Homer, I live in Providence, and I am writing in support of Representative Stewart's bill H5467 Motor Fuel Tax – 30% Allocation to RIPTA.

I have the good fortune to live in the area of Providence served by RIPTA bus lines 27, 28, 17, and 19. I have several neighbors who I regularly see carrying armloads of grocery bags several blocks from the bus stop to their homes. I don't know how they would literally feed their families if RIPTA had to endure major cuts to workers and service and my neighbors could no longer get to and from the grocery store. On the other hand, if RIPTA were to be fully funded and be able to expand services and amenities, those same neighbors might have a bench to sit on at the bus stop or a basic bus shelter to get out of bad weather while they wait - small things that add up to a greater sense of dignity when it feels like your community cares about you. If you have not done so already, I would challenge anyone reading this testimony to see how uncomfortable and unnatural it feels to wait at a bus stop in the middle of a sidewalk that has no seating, no shelter, no trash can, and barely has a RIPTA sign if you know where to look for it. If RIPTA gets funded, we could remove that unpleasant indignity of feeling exposed for our transit-using neighbors.

I am writing to urge your support for Senate Bills S46 and S47, which are critical to the sustainability and future growth of public transit in Rhode Island. These bills present a key opportunity to close this gap by securing a more reliable and stable funding source for RIPTA. Together, H5467 and H5468 offer a targeted solution that could help close as much as \$7 million of this deficit, while also providing a long-term mechanism to protect transit funding in the face of evolving challenges. This includes addressing the long-term decline of the gas tax revenue, which is expected to decrease as electric vehicles become more widespread. RIPTA's current funding is closely tied to the state's gasoline tax, which allocates 9.75 cents per gallon to public transit. However, this allocation has not kept pace with the overall increase in the gas tax, which has risen from 32.5 cents to 38 cents per gallon, including an environmental fee. If RIPTA had maintained its previous 30% share of total gas tax revenue, it would be receiving an additional \$7 million annually—resources that would make a real difference in ensuring reliable, equitable public transit services across the state.

The Blackstone Boulevard Trolley shelter near Swan Point Cemetery is a standing reminder of the way our state used to invest in our public infrastructure and public transit more broadly. I will take this opportunity to relate that one of the many reasons our country saw the decline of the robust, widespread public transit network that we had around the turn of the century, was a failure to address inflation in fare pricing contracts. Let's not let history repeat itself.

In addition to ensuring RIPTA receives its fair share of gas tax revenue, it is essential to address the current inflation adjustment process. As it stands, the adjustment occurs every two years but only accounts for one year's worth of inflation. This insufficient adjustment fails to keep up with the rising costs of maintaining and expanding public transit. By adding an additional penny per gallon to the gas tax starting next year, we could provide RIPTA with an extra \$1.3 million annually—resources that could be reinvested in better services, expanded routes, and improved infrastructure.

With both bills, H5467 and H5468, we have an opportunity to create a more sustainable, forward-thinking funding structure for RIPTA and public transit in Rhode Island. This will not only help fill the immediate funding gap, but also set the stage for a more reliable and equitable transportation system in the years to come. I strongly urge the Senate Finance Committee to prioritize these bills and take decisive action in supporting public transit as a critical part of Rhode Island's future.

I urge you to support H5467 & H5468, to give RIPTA a fair share of the Motor Fuel Tax and support the riders who rely on the service.

Sincerely,

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Merissa Homer
Providence, RI