



May 21, 2025

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
Chairman
House Committee on Finance
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Written Testimony In Support of HB6020 & Save RIPTA Legislative Package for FY2026 Budget

Dear Chairman Abney and Committee Members:

I am writing to express my strong support for an increased funding allocation for RIPTA in the FY26 budget with HB6020 with its proposal to fully fund Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) and identify increased funding in future years that provides RIPTA with a stable funding solution that no longer relies on the federal government or declining gas tax revenue. As a downtown resident and an avid supporter of public transit, I firmly believe that enhancing our public transportation system is crucial for sustainable urban living, economic growth, and environmental health.

The situation in Washington, D.C. has made it clear that the current Administration will not provide a federal solution to our transit fiscal cliff. Our last hope of saving public transit is now in the hands of the State of Rhode Island. The General Assembly generously allocated \$15 million to RIPTA last year, but this one-time rescue was not a sustainable solution.

That is why this year, the legislative champions of the Save RIPTA coalition have introduced a package of bills – with HB6020 of the highest priority – that will fix RIPTA's funding issues both in the short and in the long term.

Bus lines represent access to opportunity. Rhode Island has the foundation of a wonderful statewide bus system, but it has suffered from disinvestment and neglect for many years. The transit system is key to our efforts to reduce emissions, to connect communities, and to create healthy, vibrant local economies. But in order to make that a reality, we need to invest in it like the serious piece of infrastructure that it is: that means preserving and expanding service, maintaining a thriving workforce, and making sure it is timely and reliable.

According to the Federal Transit Administration's database, Rhode Island invested just \$66 in transit per capita in 2019, compared to peer urbanized states like Connecticut (\$80), Delaware (\$110), or Massachusetts (\$253). Still, RIPTA is already one of the most cost efficient, well-run mid-sized transit agencies in the nation, outperforming Hartford and Worcester's transit systems by significant margins per service hour. RIPTA's operating budget is already incredibly efficient and has no more margin for austerity; it is unreasonable to expect further cost savings to be possible without service cuts.

As an avid supporter of transit, I am relying on you to find a stable funding solution for RIPTA. Securing new and diverse funding streams that do not rely on the federal government or declining gas tax revenue will not only achieve financial stability but allow for the expansion of service to meet the needs of a growing population that requires the affordable and sustainable travel option that public transit provides.

Therefore, I urge you to support both HB6020 and the larger legislative package, which advocates for additional funding to fully fund RIPTA in the upcoming FY2026 house budgetary session. Inaction will be felt for generations if we allow public transportation to languish at this critical moment. I urge you, our leaders, to finally give RIPTA the resources it needs to move more riders and the state in the right direction.

Fully funding RIPTA will significantly improve the quality, efficiency, and accessibility of public transportation in Rhode Island. This, in turn, will increase ridership, reduce traffic congestion, and contribute to cleaner air and healthier communities. Investing in our public transit system is essential for providing equitable access to employment, education, and healthcare for all residents, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Providing adequate funding for RIPTA is investing in Rhode Island's future. I urge you and your colleagues to support this bill and commit to the long-term sustainability and prosperity of our state.

Thank you for your consideration and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Arnold B Chace Jr.' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Arnold B Chace Jr.
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