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My name is Deborah-Jane Suggs, and I am a lifelong resident of the State of Rhode Island, residing in Kingston. I'm writing to urge you to support the \$32.6 Million Budget Allocation, proposed in H 6020.

I am a higher education professional dedicated to helping nontraditional student populations navigate the challenges of accessing higher education. The populations I work with include Rhode Island high school graduates from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, adult learners seeking to continue their education, and Community College students looking towards baccalaureate degree attainment.

While one would think academics is the biggest hurdle students face when trying to stay on a path to a post-secondary degree, for many, the most significant hurdles are logistical. For the students I serve, something as simple as affordable, reliable transportation can mean the difference between a student finishing college or not. Students who do not have access to reliable RIPTA service to their college campus stand to fall behind in school or drop out altogether.

If H 6020 fails to pass, the inevitable service cuts will disproportionately affect low-income students. While reliable public transportation has not been widely cited as a key to education, for my students, it is often the key component holding together a precarious balancing act that allows the student to attend school while juggling multiple other responsibilities.

I understand that the State faces challenging financial decisions; however, funding RIPTA is a cost-effective way to promote postsecondary education degree completion and support Rhode Island's long-term economic goals.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Deborah-Jane Suggs