

To The Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Merissa Homer, I live in Providence, and I am writing in support of Rep. Alzate's bill 6020 to address the \$32 million shortfall in RIPTA's funding.

I have the good fortune to live in the area of Providence served by RIPTA bus lines 27, 28, 17, and 19. In the past year I have used the bus to get back and forth from my home to P Bruins games at the AMP, conferences at the convention center, and live shows at the Providence Performing Arts Center. The RIPTA buses give me a way to access downtown without having to drive a car - which means I don't have to find somewhere to park, I don't add to traffic congestion, and I don't add to air pollution. While much of the support for this bill will rightly focus on the workforce mobility that RIPTA grants, I also want to add my voice as someone who more often than not, chooses to use RIPTA buses to go contribute to the economic engine that is our beautiful downtown core.

Statistically, I am not the average bus rider. I recognize that I am coming from a position of privilege to have the disposable income to spend on things like sports and theater tickets, and that in our nation, that's not often who we picture in our minds when we think of public transit users. After decades of underfunding and undervaluing our public transit systems, bus rides are not thought of as status symbols in the way private vehicles sometimes are. However, the words of Gustavo Petro, ring true -

"A developed country is not a place where the poor have cars. It's where the rich use public transit."

We could have a public transit system that is so robust, so reliable, and so efficient that people with a choice between the bus and a car, choose the bus. And by encouraging people to choose the bus, we could fight climate change, drive economic development, and lessen traffic congestion. *Every person that chooses to use public transit, makes the transit experience better for every other person of every mode of transportation.* We could choose that future for ourselves someday if we committed to it and funded it. But that's really not what this bill is about.

Unfortunately, up until now we as a state have chosen to underfund and undervalue public transit over several decades, which has gotten us into the \$32 million pothole we find ourselves in now. This bill is not pulling RIPTA onto a yacht and offering a glass of champagne, it's throwing them a life preserver to help keep their head above water. Public transit is a public good, and you have before you an opportunity to keep one segment of the public good afloat. The URI basketball coach's salary was approximately 8 times the salary of RIPTA's CEO last year. This is not a case of using taxpayer dollars to line the pockets of the already rich. By helping to fund RIPTA, we are choosing as a community to invest in ourselves and in our future, and to do it in a way that benefits our most economically disadvantaged now, and sets a precedent to continue growing the allure of public transit to those with more financial means and move towards a brighter future.

I urge you to support H6020 in order to give Rhode Island a chance to thrive. A state without public transit is a heart without arteries.

Sincerely,

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Merissa Homer
Providence, RI