

Dear Chairman Abney and Committee members,

My name is Veronicka Vega, I live in Woonsocket, and I am writing in support of Rep. Alzate's bill H6020. The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority(RIPTA) is facing a deficit of \$32.6 million dollars, this deficit is caused from years of underfunding and undervaluing our vital transit system that Rhode Islanders need.

Before COVID, I used RIPTA everyday to get from Woonsocket to Downtown Providence to get to JWU. After COVID, I relied on it to get around Woonsocket for work, errands, appointments, literally everything. I used RIPTA so often that I recognized the bus drivers and felt comfortable enough to even start saying hello to them. I appreciated them so much for what they were doing- working on weekends, late nights, early mornings, holidays, to get myself and others where we needed to go.

RIPTA needs to have the budget gap filled, there's no question about it. Without the funding employees could lose their jobs, services could be cut or reduced, and service will diminish in quality. People who rely on it will suffer as well. RI residents deserve a fully funded and operational public transit system and RIPTA employees deserve their benefits and a good work-life balance.

This funding shortfall could lead to service cuts, fare hikes, or reduced operational hours, disproportionately affecting low-income communities and individuals who rely on public transit to live their daily lives. Ensuring that RIPTA's deficit is addressed is not just a matter of supporting an agency—it is a matter of supporting the people of Rhode Island and their ability to thrive.

I urge you to support H6020, to give public transit and the riders who rely on RIPTA a fighting chance, averting a financial catastrophe that would result in massive job losses and an economic death spiral for some of Rhode Island's most vulnerable residents.

Sincerely,

Veronicka Vega
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