



March 10, 2026

TO: Chair Abney and Members, House Finance Committee

FROM: Carol Costa, SACRI, Executive Director; Maureen Maigret, SACRI Policy Advisor

RE: H7127 (Rhode Public Transportation Authority Budget)

SACRI is pleased to support the \$13.8M proposed in the Governor's budget to fully fund the RI Public Transportation Authority (RIPTA.) Thousands of RI transit-dependent older adults and those with disabilities rely on RIPTA for their transit needs. This includes low-income older adults who may qualify for the No-Fare program and older adults and persons with disabilities who regardless of income, can receive Half-Fare (\$1.00) during off-peak hours (9 AM – 3 PM and after 6 PM).

Several years ago, when a funding cut for RIPTA was proposed, SACRI and its partners led a robust advocacy campaign to preserve funding for this vital service that so many depend on for their transportation needs whether needed to get to medical appointments, to work or to conduct personal business.

We applaud RIPTA for the work it has done in the last several years to expand existing programs or to develop new ones aimed at strengthening its capacity to meet the needs of our growing populations of older adults and those with disabilities. These include:

- **RIDE ANYWHERE** which started as a pilot and was made permanent by the legislature. This change removed the prior restriction that only allowed the ADA paratransit program to locations within ¼ mile of a fixed route effectively providing door-to-door access anywhere in Rhode Island and eliminating the "boundary" issue for disabled passengers who live in more rural or underserved areas.
- **FLEX ON DEMAND**, a "Uber-style" service using fully ADA-accessible vans. Riders use the Flex on Demand app to request a ride within their zone. It costs the same as a bus fare (\$2) and provides door to door services without needing 24-hour advance reservations. It is currently available in Narragansett, South Kingstown, Coventry, Newport, Middletown, West Warwick, and Westerly.
- **Bus Buddy Program** - Introduced in 2025, this program provides personalized, **one-on-one support** to help new riders (especially older adults) gain confidence. A "Bus Buddy" will travel with the person to teach them how to read schedules, use the Wave fare system, and navigate transfers

As the R.I. older population continues to grow – projected to comprise one out of four persons in the state by 2030 - more persons will need RIPTA services. We urge you to support this budget request and to encourage RIPTA to continue innovations that will make its services easier to access for older adults and persons with disabilities.