



Testimony of Matthew Netto, AARP Rhode Island

**In Support of House Bill 7502**

House Finance Committee

April 8, 2026

Chairman Abney and Members the House Finance Committee:

AARP is a nonpartisan, social mission organization with 38 million members nationwide and nearly 125,000 members here in Rhode Island. We advocate on behalf of issues that impact older adults, and we appreciate the opportunity to support for requiring that all inspections, cleaning and maintenance and repairs of sidewalks along state highway and municipal roads, except for snow and ice removal, be the responsibility of the state, as House Bill 7502 By Chairwoman Shallcross Smith does.

Sidewalks play a vital role in community life. As conduits for pedestrian movement and access, they enhance connectivity and promote walking. As public spaces, sidewalks are the front steps to a community, activating streets both socially and economically. Safe, accessible, well-maintained sidewalks are a fundamental community investment that enhances public health and maximizes social capital.<sup>1</sup>

Eight in ten Americans prefer being in a community that offers sidewalks and good places to walk. Six in ten prefer a neighborhood that features a mix of houses, shops and services within an easy walk versus a neighborhood that requires a car for every errand.<sup>2</sup> Sidewalks increase foot traffic in retail centers, delivering the customers that local shops and restaurants need to thrive. Quality sidewalks are an integral part of creating a livable community for people of all ages and abilities.

A WPRI report showed that as of October of 2023 there is a backlog of 7,500 sidewalk repair requests in the city of Providence alone.<sup>3</sup> Sidewalks are a vital piece of infrastructure that connect housing, commerce, and transit. Unfortunately, many of Rhode Island's sidewalks are cracked, uneven, or crumbling, leaving them unusable. This is a problem that must be prioritized, and solutions need be implemented. House Bill 7502 shines a spotlight on the fact that the current system for maintaining sidewalks along state roads is not working.

AARP Rhode Island urges the General Assembly to address the issue of sidewalk maintenance so that our communities can be walkable and livable for all Rhode Islanders. We urge you to recommend passage on this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation.

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<sup>1</sup> National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO). (October 2012) Urban Street Design Guide pp 24-25. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/2012-nacto-urban-street-design-guide.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> National Association of Realtors. (November 2013) National Community Preference Survey.<http://www.realtor.org/articles/nar-2013-community-preference-survey>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.wpri.com/target-12/over-7500-requests-for-providence-sidewalk-repairs-tracked-in-city-database/>



Sincerely,

*Matt Netto*

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