

OFFICE OF THE TOWN ADMINISTRATOR
PHILIP G. GOULD
333-1100
Email: pgould@lincolnri.org

April 7, 2026

Dear Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee:

I write on behalf of the Town of Lincoln in strong support of House Bill 7502, an act relating to highways and sidewalks, which would clarify and appropriately assign responsibility for the maintenance of sidewalks located along state highways.

This legislation represents an important and practical step toward aligning responsibility with ownership and control. While municipalities like Lincoln are committed to maintaining safe and accessible pedestrian infrastructure, the current framework often places an undue burden on local communities to maintain sidewalks situated within state highway rights-of-way and directly tied to state-controlled roadways.

H 7502 would provide much-needed clarity by establishing that the State of Rhode Island is responsible for the maintenance of sidewalks along state highways, while municipalities would continue to manage snow and ice removal. This balanced approach recognizes the operational realities faced by both state and local governments and ensures that maintenance responsibilities are handled by the entity best positioned to address long-term repair, capital needs, and liability concerns.

For communities like Lincoln, this legislation would have a meaningful impact. The cost of maintaining sidewalks along state roads—including repairs due to age, tree root damage, and general wear—can be significant and unpredictable.

In many cases, sidewalk failures are not the result of municipal action, but rather stem from underlying stormwater drainage issues that are neither owned nor maintained by the Town. Additionally, we have encountered recurring issues related to curb cuts and utility work performed along state roads. These activities are authorized through Physical Alteration Permits (PAPs), which are issued, reviewed, and approved by the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT). While RIDOT collects the associated fees and oversees the permitting process, when that work later fails and creates a hazardous condition, the responsibility and liability often fall to the municipality.

The Town of Lincoln recently faced litigation stemming from a serious trip-and-fall injury caused by a defective section of sidewalk that originated from a state-approved PAP project. This situation highlights a fundamental inequity: municipalities are frequently held accountable for infrastructure conditions that they neither approved, constructed, nor control.

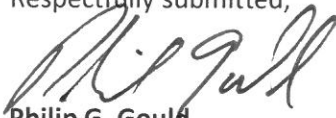
Shifting maintenance responsibility to the State would help relieve pressure on local budgets and reduce exposure to liability, allowing municipalities to better allocate limited resources toward local infrastructure priorities, public safety, and essential services.

Equally important, this bill promotes consistency in sidewalk conditions along state corridors, which serve as critical connectors for pedestrians—including school children, seniors, and individuals accessing transit, businesses, and community services. A uniform, state-managed approach to maintenance will help ensure safer and more reliable pedestrian pathways across municipal boundaries.

The Town of Lincoln respectfully urges the General Assembly to support and pass H 7502. We believe this legislation represents a fair and commonsense solution that strengthens the partnership between the State and its municipalities while enhancing public safety and infrastructure management.

Thank you for your consideration and your continued support of Rhode Island's cities and towns.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Philip G. Gould". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Philip G. Gould
Town Administrator
Town of Lincoln