

April 8, 2026

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney, Chair
House Finance Committee
Rhode Island House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: HOUSE BILL 7502– AN ACT RELATING TO HIGHWAYS -- SIDEWALKS

Chair Abney and Honorable Committee Members,

On behalf of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns and our 39 member municipalities, we write to express our strong support for House Bill 7502, a League priority piece of legislation. This bill seeks to shift the responsibility for maintenance of sidewalks along state highways, excluding snow and ice removal, from municipalities back to the state government, where it originally resided.

This legislation represents a long-overdue effort to realign responsibility for infrastructure that is fundamentally part of the state's transportation system. We appreciate Chair Mary Ann Shallcross Smith's leadership and continued efforts in advancing this important proposal on behalf of Rhode Island municipalities.

We recognize and appreciate the analysis provided regarding the scope, cost, and operational considerations associated with this proposal. Ensuring safe and accessible pedestrian infrastructure across nearly 600 miles of sidewalks and tens of thousands of curb ramps is a significant undertaking, and thoughtful planning will be essential to successful implementation. At the same time, these realities underscore the broader point that this responsibility is more appropriately managed at the state level, where there is greater capacity to coordinate long-term capital planning, asset management, and system-wide prioritization.

Importantly, while the projected costs reflect a comprehensive, system-wide investment, including assumptions related to uniform rehabilitation standards, implementation would reasonably occur over time through phased capital planning and prioritization, rather than as a one-time undertaking. As with other large-scale transportation investments, improvements can be sequenced based on condition, safety needs, and available resources.

Currently, municipalities are responsible for maintaining sidewalks adjacent to state highways, despite the fact that these corridors are owned and controlled by the state and serve regional transportation needs. The cost and logistical challenges associated with sidewalk inspections, cleaning, repairs, and remediation of hazardous conditions have placed a sustained strain on local budgets, particularly in communities with limited fiscal capacity.

We offer the following considerations:

- **Alignment of Responsibility:** Sidewalk infrastructure along state highways functions as part of a broader, interconnected transportation network. Shifting maintenance responsibility to the state could support more cohesive planning and execution, while also providing municipalities with relief from ongoing logistical challenges.
- **Long-Term Planning and Investment:** While some cost projections have been provided, the League recognizes that actual expenses may vary based on phasing, prioritization, and evolving conditions. A centralized approach could allow for more consistent evaluation and strategic investment across the network, rather than relying on fragmented, locally driven maintenance efforts.
- **Municipal Fiscal Impact:** Many cities and towns already face substantial budget pressures for maintaining sidewalks along state corridors. Transitioning this responsibility has the potential to provide meaningful relief, enabling municipalities to focus resources on other locally owned infrastructure and services.
- **Existing Programs as a Complement, Not a Substitute:** Programs such as Rhode Restore and other partnership-based initiatives remain valuable tools and should continue to be supported and expanded. At the same time, they do not fully address the structural challenge of state-owned sidewalk maintenance. House Bill 7502 provides a framework that could better align responsibilities with ownership while supporting statewide consistency.
- **Implementation Considerations:** The League acknowledges that any transition of this scope would require careful phasing, evaluation, and identification of sustainable funding sources. We stand ready to work collaboratively with the state to ensure that any implementation is thoughtful, strategic, and effective.

House Bill 7502 reflects a commitment to improving safety, accessibility, and consistency across Rhode Island's transportation infrastructure. By aligning responsibility with ownership, the state can better ensure that sidewalks along its roadways are maintained to a high and uniform standard.

We respectfully urge the General Assembly to support this important legislation on behalf of all its residents.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to reach out if we can provide any additional information or assistance.

Sincerely,



Randy R. Rossi
Executive Director

Cc: Honorable Members of House Finance Committee