



Mayor of Providence

Brett P. Smiley

April 9, 2026

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

Dear Chair Abney and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I am writing in support of House Bill 8354, which would authorize the state to issue \$18 million in general obligation bonds, subject to voter approval, to support the Roger Williams Park Zoo. Bond proceeds would be used to renovate existing exhibit space and convert the former education center into a year-round, accessible, climate-controlled facility. We also respectfully request that the bond proposal include \$10 million to fund the critical repair and stabilization needs of two historic bridges, the Canonicus and Miantonomi Bridges in Roger Williams Park.

The Zoo, located within Roger Williams Park, is a nationally recognized institution that has been connecting people with wildlife for more than 150 years. As one of Rhode Island's leading tourist attractions, the Zoo welcomes approximately 800,000 visitors annually from across the region and around the world. It is a major driver of tourism and economic activity, offering educational, recreational, and conservation experiences for people of all ages. The City of Providence strongly supports these investments, which will improve the visitor experience, strengthen year-round programming, and help ensure the Zoo remains a key contributor to Rhode Island's tourism economy.

The bridge infrastructure issues in Roger Williams Park directly affects access to the Zoo and the surrounding park facilities. The Canonicus Bridge and Miantonomi Bridges currently operate under modified access and weight restrictions due to structural concerns. These bridges serve as primary access points to the peninsula that houses park maintenance facilities, the Providence Police Mounted Command, the Roger Williams Park Botanical Center, and key circulation routes used by Zoo and Park visitors.

If either bridge were to fail or require closure, access to these facilities, including the Zoo, would be significantly disrupted. Traffic, including school buses and park visitors, would be diverted through neighboring residential and commercial streets that are not designed to accommodate

this volume. The Rhode Island Department of Transportation estimates that repairs and structural improvements to these bridges will cost approximately \$10 million.

These improvements are essential to ensuring safe, reliable access to the Zoo and the broader park campus and will help the park accommodate the increased visitation these Zoo improvements are intended to attract.

We are enthusiastic about the Zoo's future and the opportunity to strengthen one of Rhode Island's most important cultural and tourism assets. Ensuring that the park's infrastructure can safely support that growth is a necessary and responsible complement to the Zoo's proposed improvements.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support House Bill 8354 with the inclusion of funding to address these critical bridge repairs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brett P. Smiley" followed by a large, stylized flourish that extends to the right and ends in a vertical line.

Brett P. Smiley
Mayor