



LOCAL DIVISION 618
AMALGAMATED TRANSIT UNION, AFL-CIO-CLC
HEADQUARTERS

172 LONGFELLOW STREET, (2ND FLOOR) • PROVIDENCE, RI 02907
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Dear Chair Abney and Committee members,

My name is **Walter Melillo President, Business Agent, ATU Local 618**, I live in **Cranston**, and I am writing in support of Representative Stewart's H8145, which would restrict the current 7% sales tax on Uber and Lyft rides to fund RIPTA's Paratransit and Ride Anywhere programs.

I represent approximately **700 employees** at the **Rhode Island Public Transit Authority**. These service reductions have significantly impacted the health and safety of our members, resulting in diminished recovery periods while on duty and negatively affecting both their mental and physical well-being. Also the Ride Program has reached its highest level of ridership and is placing significant demands on our members.

Last year the General Assembly passed the FY '26 budget with language stating that paratransit was not to receive any cuts and the one-year Ride Anywhere pilot, which increases paratransit service statewide, be made permanent. However, **no additional funding was provided for these programs to address skyrocketing demand** caused by cuts to the fixed route system, the larger paratransit service area, and an increasingly older population.

The demand for paratransit service is so high that RIPTA is forced to supplement its own vehicles and drivers with expensive private taxi rides. Meanwhile, paratransit riders are experiencing longer and longer wait times and declining customer service.

As a transit worker and supporter, I am relying on you to support this simple solution for increasing support for people with disabilities to travel around our state by diverting the existing sales tax from rides taken on Uber and Lyft — companies that are actively hurting public transit. This will not only achieve better financial stability for RIPTA, but allow for the sustainability and improvement of statewide paratransit service for all Rhode Islanders who qualify for the service due to a disability.

I urge you to support H8145, to increase revenue for RIPTA, giving Rhode Island residents access to affordable transportation and providing sustainable funding for public transit to thrive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Walter Melillo", written over the printed name.

Walter Melillo

President, Business Agent, ATU Local 618