



April 14, 2026

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney | Chairman
House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street – Room 35
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Written Testimony in Support of H8316 (Making an Appropriation of \$150,000 to the Main Street Rhode Island Program)

Dear Chairman Abney & Fellow Committee Members:

I am writing to express my strong support of continued state funding for the Main Street Rhode Island program, managed by Grow Smart RI in alignment with Main Street America. I urge the Committee to approve the \$150,000 appropriation in H8316 for FY27. This is a high-return, high-impact economic development investment, and the time to act is now.

Rhode Island's walkable, historic commercial districts are among the state's most underutilized economic assets. Main Street Rhode Island exists to change that, through a coordinated statewide network backed by Main Street America's 46-year track record. What makes this program work is who it brings together. The network currently spans across 28 of our 39 municipalities, connecting local government, neighborhood associations, community development leaders, and small business owners at the same table, to brainstorm and build strategies no individual community can generate on its own. Main Street Rhode Island serves as the catalyst for strengthening our Main Street districts as places where small businesses can succeed, and community connections can grow. We need to capitalize on this momentum.

State investment in this program is not a subsidy or grant, it is leverage. The Main Street America model carries a documented average return on investment of 24 to 1, generating much needed state and municipal revenue. Intentional local efforts produced through participation in this program attract private spending, business reinvestment, and property development that would not otherwise occur. A well-resourced state coordinating program creates the conditions for that investment: trained local leadership, documented strategies, and a credible, connected network of communities ready to act. Every dollar of state funding directed toward this infrastructure is a multiplier for local economic activity.

Over the past 30 years, Cornish Associates has tried to provide the blueprint for successful urban renewal with the redevelopment of 13 historic buildings downtown, delivering over 300 units of housing in downtown Providence, with the aim of creating a mixed-use residential neighborhood in the city's center. By working with city leaders and the community, together, we realized that vision with the establishment of mixed-use properties, such as the Westminster Lofts, repurposing the Biltmore Garage, updating the Providence Journal Building, and constructing the Nightingale – a six-story apartment complex with the Nordblom Company. While these housing developments in our capital city have been successful because of people's desire to live in a walkable urban community, we can do more.

As we near the end of Year 1 of the three-year pilot established by the 2025 legislation, the state's early investment is beginning to compound. Communities participating in the inaugural "learning cohort" are moving from learning to action, developing projects with real economic potential through Main Street America's Four Point Approach. That technical assistance pipeline exists only because Rhode Island currently has an active state-level membership in Main Street America. Without continued funding, that partnership cannot be sustained, the momentum communities have built would stall, and the returns the state has already begun to seed would be left unrealized.

I respectfully urge this committee to approve the \$150,000 appropriation for Main Street Rhode Island in FY27.

Thank you for your consideration and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Arnold B. Chace Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Arnold B. Chace Jr.
Founder & Managing Partner
Cornish Associates
Downtown Providence Resident

46 Aborn Street
Providence, RI 02903
PH 401.421.0254
FX 401.421.6866

WWW.CORNISHLP.COM