

CITY OF CENTRAL FALLS  
PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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April 14, 2026

House Finance Committee  
Rhode Island General Assembly  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: Written Testimony in Support of House Resolution H8316 (MAKING AN APPROPRIATION OF \$150,000 TO THE MAIN STREET RHODE ISLAND PROGRAM)**

**FROM: Jim Vandermillen, Director, Department of Planning and Economic Development, City of Central Falls**

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the Rhode Island House Finance Committee:

As Director of the Department of Planning and Economic Development for the City of Central Falls, committed to building and supporting a strong local economy and a unique sense of place, I write in strong support of continued state funding for Main Street Rhode Island, managed by Grow Smart RI in alignment with Main Street America. I urge the Committee to approve the \$150,000 appropriation in H8316 for FY 2027. This is a high-return economic development investment, and the time to act is now.

Rhode Island's walkable, historic commercial districts, including Broad Street and Dexter Street in Central Falls, 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. Through free monthly roundtables, network convenings, technical assistance trainings, and the inaugural Main Street Together Conference, 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.

Central Falls joined Main Street Rhode Island's first Learning Cohort so that we could tap into Main Street America's proven success in building and supporting strong local economies. The many small, locally-owned businesses located along Broad Street and Dexter Street – Central Falls' "Main Streets" -- are the lifeblood of our economy and culture. Our participation in the Main Street RI network is enabling our staff and local partners to bring Main Street America's national expertise and proven track record to Central Falls to benefit our local businesses, with much needed coordination and support from Grow Smart RI.

As part of the Main Street RI network, our City staff and community partners are building the local capacity that is essential to not only support our businesses, but to ensure that they and our local economy thrive and grow. This work will take more than one year, and that is why it is essential to continue support for Main Street RI.

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 the House Finance Committee to approve the \$150,000 appropriation for Main Street Rhode Island in FY 2027.**

Thank you for your consideration. I invite you to contact me should you have any questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,



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