



CITY OF PROVIDENCE
MAYOR BRETT P. SMILEY

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: Joseph I Mulligan, III, Director
Department of Planning & Development -City of Providence

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

As Director of Planning & Development for the City of Providence, we work to shape the future of Providence and ensure a high quality of life for city residents and a vibrant, attractive urban environment for businesses, workers and visitors. 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.

Providence's walkable, historic commercial districts are among our most important economic assets but face severe challenges in the digital economy. Raising costs and forthcoming advances in "quick commerce" promulgated by multi-national on-line shopping conglomerates will continue to erode our "bricks and mortar" retailers, potentially eroding long established business districts and constraining new start-ups and entrepreneurial initiatives throughout our communities. Main Street Rhode Island exists to change that, through a coordinated statewide network backed by Main Street America's 46-year track record.

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.

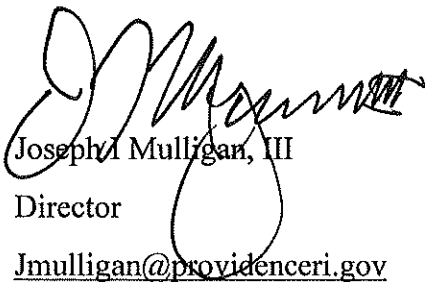
As we near the end of Year 1 of the three-year pilot established by the 2025 legislation, the state's early investment is beginning to compound. Communities participating in the inaugural "learning cohort" are moving from learning to action, developing projects with real economic potential through Main 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.

As someone who has been involved in the Main Streets movement for most of my adult life, I have witnessed the benefits of bringing business, community and political leadership together to maintain economic vitality and quality of life to our cities and towns.

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.

Sincerely,



Joseph A. Mulligan, III
Director
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