



Testimony of Matthew Netto, AARP Rhode Island

In Support of House Resolution 8316

House Finance Committee

April 14, 2026

Chairman Abney and Members the House Finance Committee:

AARP is a nonpartisan, social mission organization with 38 million members nationwide, including nearly 125,000 members here in Rhode Island. We advocate on issues that impact older adults and their families, and we appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 8316, sponsored by Deputy Majority Leader Handy, which authorizes the appropriation of one hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000) to the Main Street Rhode Island Program.

Rhode Island's walkable, historic commercial districts are among the state's most underutilized economic assets. The Main Street Rhode Island Program exists to strengthen these districts through a coordinated statewide network supported by Main Street America's 46-year track record. This program's success lies in its collaborative model. The network spans 28 of Rhode Island's 39 municipalities and brings together local government officials, neighborhood associations, community development leaders, and small business owners to develop and implement strategies that no single community could generate independently.

AARP Rhode Island works closely with municipalities on policies and investments that create more livable communities. Livable communities are compact and walkable, with housing, retail, services, and community features located near one another. Key characteristics include safe, walkable streets; age-friendly and affordable housing and transportation options; and convenient access to essential services. These communities also benefit from affordable and reliable high-speed internet, which supports work, access to health care, commerce, and social connection. Community amenities—such as parks, libraries, and civic gathering spaces—further enhance opportunities for residents of all ages to participate in civic and social life.

A vibrant main street is a cornerstone of a livable community. AARP's mission is to enable older adults to choose how they live as they age. Walkable neighborhoods, affordable housing and transportation options, and access to essential goods and services allow older adults to remain in their communities as they age, should they choose to do so. Investments that strengthen Rhode Island's main streets directly support independence, health, and quality of life for older residents.

For these reasons, AARP Rhode Island respectfully urges the House Finance Committee to approve the \$150,000 appropriation for the Main Street Rhode Island Program in Fiscal Year 2027.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your consideration.



Sincerely,

Matt Netto

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