



April 14, 2026

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney, Chair  
House Finance Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION H 8317 — MAKING AN APPROPRIATION OF \$5,000,000 TO THE RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC TRANSIT AUTHORITY**

Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

On behalf of **United Way of Rhode Island** and the **Alliance for Nonprofit Impact**, we write in strong support of **House Joint Resolution H 8317**, which would appropriate **\$5,000,000** to the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) to continue current statewide service, support operator hiring and training, restore service cuts, address a budget deficit, and avoid borrowing against future capital funds.

United Way's policy and advocacy work is guided by our strategic framework: **Strong Families, Strong Nonprofits, Strong United Way**. We prioritize policies that strengthen household stability, expand access to opportunity, and ensure public investments deliver measurable value. Reliable public transportation is essential infrastructure within this framework—connecting residents to employment, education and training, health care, and basic needs supports, while enabling nonprofits and public agencies to deliver services effectively.

Public transit is also directly tied to Rhode Island's nonprofit service capacity and workforce stability. The nonprofit sector is the state's service delivery backbone, yet workforce constraints continue to limit service availability. According to the **2024 RI Nonprofit Survey**, **55%** of nonprofit vacancies lasted **more than three months**, and **13%** lasted **more than six months**, contributing to delayed access and longer waiting lists for essential services. Many of the hardest-to-fill roles are entry-level and frontline positions that require workers to reliably access jobs across municipalities and shift schedules, making a functional transit system a workforce necessity, not a convenience.

Transportation affordability is a material barrier for many workers and families. Insurance.com estimates the **five-year cost of car ownership in Rhode Island at \$28,771**, illustrating the scale of costs associated with car dependence. For households without reliable vehicles—or without the financial margin to absorb insurance, repairs, and fuel; RIPTA service and accessibility is often the determining factor in whether a person can accept or sustain employment, access training, or reach appointments.

This is especially salient for families experiencing financial hardship. United For ALICE reporting cited in legislative materials notes that **39% of Rhode Island households** were below the ALICE Threshold in 2023 (poverty plus ALICE), including **51,069 households in poverty** and **122,439**



**ALICE households**—families who work but still cannot afford the basics. In this context, transit funding is a practical economic stability strategy: it reduces barriers to work and services for households with the least flexibility to navigate disruptions.

The health case is also clear. The Rhode Island Department of Health emphasizes that access to reliable, affordable transportation is fundamental to healthy communities, and that lack of transportation limits access to health care, healthy food, and steady employment. Accessible public transit is a recognized tool to improve community health.

For these reasons, United Way of Rhode Island and the Alliance for Nonprofit Impact respectfully urge your support for **H 8317**. This targeted appropriation protects and stabilizes a core statewide system that Rhode Islanders, employers, and service that providers rely on—advancing workforce participation, household stability, and effective service delivery across all 39 cities and towns.

Sincerely,

Elijah McLean  
Manager, Government Relations & Policy  
United Way Rhode Island