

# North Tiverton Fire District



April 28, 2026

House Finance Committee  
State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

**SENT VIA EMAIL:** *HouseFinance@rilegislature.gov*

**RE: House Bill H7244: Revisions to RIGL 24-8.1-2 “Relocation of Utility Services”**

Honorable Chairman Abney and Committee Members:

My name is Robert Ouellette, and I am the General Manager of the North Tiverton Fire District (NTFD), a quasi-municipal water utility serving the residents and businesses of Tiverton, Rhode Island. On behalf of the NTFD, I write in strong support of the proposed amendments to RIGL 24-8.1-2, “Relocation of Utility Services,” as set forth in House Bill H7244.

As currently written, RIGL 24-8.1-2 places an inequitable financial burden on municipal and quasi-municipal water utilities, and by extension, on their ratepayers, when state-initiated highway or roadway projects require the relocation of utility infrastructure. **The costs of those relocations should not fall on the customers of a utility that had no role in initiating the project.** Public water suppliers are already struggling with the high costs to deliver a safe and reliable water supply. NTFD has made substantial capital investments in upgrading our primary distribution infrastructure, much of which runs within state roadways. Many of those projects are still bond-financed, meaning our ratepayers are already carrying debt service on that infrastructure. Compelling those same ratepayers to absorb an additional, unplanned expense to accommodate a state highway project would be both fiscally damaging and fundamentally unfair.

H7244 takes a sensible and targeted approach to correcting this problem. By distinguishing between municipal and quasi-municipal utilities, whose costs are borne entirely by local ratepayers, and private investor-owned utilities, the bill directs full state reimbursement where the public interest is most directly affected, while leaving the

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existing fifty percent (50%) framework in place for private companies. This is a precise, well-reasoned statutory fix, and exactly the kind of reform the General Assembly should adopt.

Rhode Island's current 50% cap places our state among the outliers nationally on this issue. Both Connecticut and Massachusetts treat utility relocation costs as a cost of the highway project itself, not a cost to be shifted onto ratepayers. Rhode Island is the exception, not the rule, and H7244 would begin to correct that.

We also note the potential federal dimension of this legislation. To the extent that full state reimbursement of relocation costs on federally funded highway projects may allow the state to recover a greater share of those costs from federal programs, H7244 could provide a fiscal benefit to the state as well as to local ratepayers. We encourage the committee to explore that question with RIDOT and the Federal Highway Administration.

For these reasons, the North Tiverton Fire District supports the amendments to RIGL 24-8.1-2 as proposed by House Bill H7244, and we respectfully urge the committee to advance this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Ouellette". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "O".

Robert Ouellette  
General Manager