

RI Minority Elder Task Force
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May 13, 2026

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

Re: Support of House Bill 8171

Dear Honorable Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

On behalf of the Rhode Island Minority Elder Task Force, we are writing in strong support of House Bill 8171, which would establish a task force to develop a Food As Medicine Medicaid pilot program in Rhode Island.

The Rhode Island Minority Elder Task Force has seen firsthand the devastating impact that food insecurity has on older adults and vulnerable Rhode Islanders throughout our communities. Through our work, we regularly assist individuals facing urgent crises by helping provide emergency funds for food, groceries, and other essential basic needs. Far too often, we encounter older adults who are forced to choose between purchasing food, medications, utilities, or other necessities required to survive safely and with dignity.

We also see how food insecurity disproportionately impacts historically underserved and marginalized communities, contributing to worsening chronic health conditions, increased isolation, preventable hospitalizations, and declining quality of life. For many older adults living with diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, or other chronic illnesses, access to nutritious food is not optional; it is a critical component of healthcare and wellness.

House Bill 8171 represents an important and forward-thinking opportunity for Rhode Island to explore how nutrition-based interventions can improve health outcomes while potentially reducing long-term healthcare costs. A Food As Medicine initiative acknowledges what community organizations, healthcare providers, caregivers, and advocates witness every day: access to healthy food directly impacts a person's ability to remain healthy, stable, and independent in the community.

We strongly support the creation of this task force and encourage the inclusion of community-based organizations, advocates for older adults, and culturally responsive service providers in the planning and development process. It is critical that the voices and lived experiences of those most impacted by food insecurity help shape this work.

The Rhode Island Minority Elder Task Force respectfully urges the House Finance Committee to support and advance House Bill 8171.

Thank you for your consideration and your continued commitment to improving the health and well-being of Rhode Islanders.

Sincerely,

Janette Conway

Janette Conway, Chair
Rhode Island Minority Elder Task Force
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