

May 20, 2026

Re: House Bill 8562

Dear Committee Members

I am writing to express my support for House Bill 8562, but with further amendments. My sincere compliments to Speaker Blazewski on pushing for the creation of an Inspector General. In the wake of the Washington Bridge fiasco, polling has shown that Rhode Islanders overwhelmingly want an Inspector General. It is a welcome surprise to see State House leadership support clean government ideas. However, there are three changes to the legislation which are needed to ensure that an Inspector General is truly independent, non-partisan, and effective.

First, the proposed legislation exempts the General Assembly and the Rhode Island Judiciary from oversight by the Inspector General. The Inspector General's job is to prevent and detect "fraud, waste, abuse and mismanagement." The executive branch is not the only branch in state government that could have fraud, waste, abuse and mismanagement. Rhode Island history provides some examples of fraud, waste, abuse and mismanagement involving the other two branches. The Inspector General should have oversight over all of state government. No part of state government is entirely immune from waste, fraud and abuse.

Second, the proposed legislation indicates that the Inspector General is appointed by the governor from a list of three names submitted by an independent advisory commission of five individuals, of which three are partisan elected statewide officials. This means a majority of the group creating the list are made up of politicians. When a majority of a group is made of politicians, politics will likely influence the decisions of that group. The Inspector General must be "independent and nonpartisan." The Inspector General is supposed to be an independent watch dog. The Ethics Commission is supposed to be a watch dog. The Judicial Nominating Commission is supposed to be independent. However, the members of the Ethics Commission and Judicial Nominating Commission are selected by politicians. At times, these commissions appear to be influenced by politics and do not act independently. In order to make the Inspector General less susceptible to politics, the members of the independent advisory commission that creates the list should not be in politics. The proposed legislation states that one of the five members of the independent advisory commission will be President of the Association of Inspectors General. Rather than just having the President play a role in the selection, the Executive Committee of the Association of Inspectors General should simply act as independent advisory commission. The Executive Committee of the Association of Inspectors General alone should screen applications and provide a list of three names from which the governor can pick. This is the best way to ensure that Inspector General is truly an independent watch dog.

Third, the proposed legislation places certain restrictions on who is eligible to be an Inspector General. For example, a person is ineligible if he or she was a state legislator, a public office holder or had an executive branch cabinet level position within the prior year. However, eligibility should be more restricted. The proposed legislation prohibits anyone from being employed by the Inspector General if they are a candidate for elective office or hold a political party position. Likewise, a person should be ineligible to be Inspector General if he or she was a

candidate for elective office or held a political party office within the prior year. This would further ensure that the Inspector General is “nonpartisan.” Perhaps, eligibility to be an Inspector General should be restricted to individuals who have not been a resident of the state for the past year. Rhode Island is a small, densely populated state that is rather parochial and insular. An Inspector General, who was an out-of-state resident, would likely have a real outsider’s perspective on state government, and would be free of many of the inherent conflicts that arise from living and working in such a small state over the course of one’s life.

These recommendations would mean some major changes to the bill. However, by pushing for an Inspector General, Speaker Blazewski, unlike his risk adverse predecessor, has shown some initial willingness to be bold. Because of the Washington Bridge fiasco, Rhode Islanders are hungry for some boldness. I hope the Speaker will seize the moment to make a meaningful and major reform to state government.

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