



February 9th, 2026

House Committee on Judiciary
Rhode Island House of Representatives

RE: Testimony SUPPORTING House Bill 7488

Dear Chair McEntee and Honorable Committee Members,

I am writing in my capacity as the Rhode Island State Long Term Care Ombudsman to express strong support for House Bill 7488, which removes the requirement that neglect of an older adult or long term care resident be proven “willful” or “intentional.”

The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program is charged with advocating for the safety, rights, and well-being of individuals who live in nursing homes, assisted living residences, and other care settings. Every day, our office responds to complaints involving inadequate care, unmet needs, and harm to vulnerable residents. Through this work, we see firsthand how the current statutory language limits accountability and leaves too many Rhode Islanders without meaningful protection.

Under existing Rhode Island law, neglect is defined differently depending on who the victim is. In most states and under federal law neglect is recognized based on the failure to provide necessary care, treatment, or services, regardless of intent. Rhode Island’s own statutes protecting individuals with developmental disabilities follow this same common sense approach. Yet when it comes to older adults and residents of healthcare facilities, Rhode Island law requires proof that neglect was “intentional” in order to meet the legal definition.

This distinction is both unnecessary and harmful.

In real world practice, neglect in long term care settings rarely occurs because a caregiver deliberately wishes to cause harm. Far more often, it results from inadequate staffing levels, poor training, lack of supervision, or systemic failures within a facility. Residents suffer serious consequences untreated medical conditions, falls, malnutrition, dehydration, and loss of dignity regardless of whether anyone meant for that harm to occur.

From the perspective of a resident, neglect is neglect. The impact does not change based on motive.



Requiring proof of intent creates an artificial and unjust barrier to protecting vulnerable people. It allows facilities to avoid responsibility even when residents are clearly harmed by failures in care, simply by arguing that the outcome was not deliberate. That loophole undermines accountability and weakens the ability of regulators, advocates, and families to ensure safe and humane treatment.

Those who choose to work in positions of responsibility for frail and dependent individuals are expected to understand and meet basic standards of care. When they fail to do so, the absence of malicious intent should not excuse the neglect.

There is no reasonable basis for Rhode Island to maintain a weaker standard of protection for older adults than exists for other populations, or than exists in the vast majority of other states. All vulnerable Rhode Islanders deserve equal and consistent safeguards under the law.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support H7488 and remove the intent requirement from the definition of neglect. This change will strengthen resident protections, promote accountability, and better reflect the realities faced by those living in long term care.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to the health and safety of Rhode Island's most vulnerable residents.

Sincerely,
Lori Light
Rhode Island State Long Term Care Ombudsman