



Testimony of Matthew Netto, AARP Rhode Island  
**In support of House Bill 7488**  
House Judiciary Committee  
February 10, 2026

Chairman McEntee and members of the House Judiciary Committee:

AARP is a nonpartisan, social mission organization with 38 million members nationwide and nearly 125,000 members here in Rhode Island. We advocate on behalf of issues that impact older adults, and we appreciate the opportunity to offer our support for Representative Potter's House Bill 7488.

AARP policy states that federal, state, and local agencies should collaborate to prevent, detect, and prosecute all forms of elder abuse. House Bill 7488 would protect older Rhode Islanders by removing the intent requirement relative to the definitions of "abuse" within the chapter on "abuse in healthcare facilities" and amends the definitions of "abuse" and "neglect" with regard to elderly affairs by deleting the element of willful conduct. Abuse is abuse whether it was intentional or not and should be treated as such.

Rhode Island's older adult population is growing rapidly. Estimates show that by 2030, 1 out of every 4 Rhode Islanders will be 65 years of age or older. A survey from the National Institute of Justice found that 11 percent of adults ages 60 and older experienced at least one form of abuse in the prior year. Nursing home residents are especially vulnerable to abuse. According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), reports of abuse occurring in nursing homes more than doubled between 2013 and 2017.

House Bill 7488 would allow for a simpler definition of 'abuse' and 'neglect', eliminating the debate over whether the abuse was intentional. Currently, the terms 'abuse' and 'neglect' are being defined inconsistently in Rhode Island law. Rhode Island's statute protecting people with developmental disabilities omits any intent requirement. In addition, the laws of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and 40 other states contain no intent or willfulness requirement in their definitions of neglect.

Health care facilities and caregivers have a duty of care, because of the very nature of their relationship with the adults they serve. However, despite that duty, bad actors can claim that they didn't mean for the abuse to occur and escape accountability.

Current statutory language creates loopholes that allow for facilities to avoid responsibility. These loopholes limit the effectiveness of Rhode Island's Adult Protective Services within the Office of Healthy Aging and weakens protections for vulnerable residents. As our aging population grows, our laws must better reflect the realities of how neglect occurs and ensures stronger accountability.

AARP Rhode Island supports House Bill 7488 because it strengthens protection for older adults by closing legal loop holes and holds individuals and institutions responsible for abuse that happens to individuals in their care. We urge you to recommend passage on House Bill 7488. Thank you for your time and consideration.



Sincerely,

*Matthew Netto*

Matthew Netto  
Associate State Director-AARP Rhode Island