



*Distinctive Communities
Powerful Alliance*

February 26, 2026

The Honorable Carol Hagan McEntee
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island House of Representatives
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: HOUSE BILL 7761 – AN ACT RELATING TO PARKS AND RECREATIONAL AREAS -- PUBLIC USE OF PRIVATE LANDS-LIABILITY LIMITATIONS

Dear Chair McEntee and Honorable Committee Members,

On behalf of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, we write to express our opposition to House Bill 7761, which proposes to amend the definition of “Owner” within the existing statute governing liability protections for lands open to the public for recreational use. Specifically, by removing the state and municipalities from this definition, this bill would strip local governments of long-standing liability protections that have encouraged public access to recreational lands without undue legal risk.

These liability protections are crucial for Rhode Island municipalities to maintain parks, trails, beaches, and other recreational areas that are accessible to residents and visitors alike. These safeguards allow cities and towns to make land available for public enjoyment while managing exposure to litigation. Eliminating these protections would place municipalities in a difficult position and could ultimately lead to reduced public access due to concerns over increased liability.

The unintended consequences of this legislation may include:

- Increased financial burdens on municipalities forced to allocate additional resources for liability coverage, legal defense, and risk mitigation.
- Reduced availability of recreational spaces as cities and towns consider limiting access to properties to avoid litigation risks.
- A chilling effect on efforts to expand outdoor recreational opportunities, which are vital to community health, tourism, and overall quality of life.

Rhode Island has a strong tradition of promoting outdoor recreation and ensuring public access to open space. Preserving liability protections for municipalities is essential to maintaining that balance between access and responsible governance.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the Committee reject House Bill 7761. We appreciate your time and consideration of this important matter and welcome the opportunity to work with the General Assembly on solutions that protect both public access and municipal interests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Randy R. Rossi".

Randy R. Rossi
Executive Director

Cc: Honorable Members of House Judiciary Committee