

Kenneth J. Hopkins
Mayor



Colonel Michael J. Winquist
Chief of Police

"A Nationally Accredited Agency"

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Chair Carol McEntee and Members
House Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly

RE: Letter of Support for H7550 – Unlawful Interference with Traffic / Highway Obstruction

Dear Chair McEntee and Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

I am writing to express my **strong support** for **H7550**, legislation that would establish the crime of unlawful interference with traffic and strengthen penalties for individuals who intentionally or recklessly obstruct federal and state highways in Rhode Island.

Blocking a highway is not a harmless act of protest or civil disobedience—it is a serious public safety hazard that creates immediate danger for motorists, emergency responders, and innocent residents who depend on open roadways for daily travel and urgent medical needs.

One of the greatest dangers of highway obstruction is the impact on emergency response times. When traffic is brought to a standstill, police, fire personnel, and EMS units may be delayed from reaching victims of violent crimes, fires, overdoses, or serious accidents. In a true emergency, seconds matter. When an ambulance or rescue vehicle is forced to slow down, reroute, or become trapped in gridlock caused by unlawful interference, the consequences can be catastrophic.

Highway blockages also create major risks for patients being transported to hospitals. Victims of heart attacks, strokes, traumatic injuries, or respiratory distress rely on immediate medical intervention. Preventable delays caused by roadway obstruction can mean the difference between life and death, permanent disability, or full recovery.

Additionally, highway obstructions increase the risk of secondary crashes. Sudden stopped traffic on high-speed roadways can result in rear-end collisions, chain-reaction accidents, and injuries to drivers who have no warning that the roadway ahead has been unlawfully blocked. This puts both the public and first responders at risk, especially when responders must enter dangerous traffic conditions to restore order and reopen travel lanes.

H7550 appropriately recognizes that interfering with lawful traffic flow is not merely disruptive; it can have deadly consequences. The bill also rightly provides enhanced penalties when

obstruction results in the delay of emergency vehicles, and particularly when a death occurs as a proximate result.

Rhode Island must protect individuals' rights to lawfully assemble and demonstrate, but those rights do not extend to conduct that endangers the public, impedes emergency medical care, or jeopardizes the safety of motorists and first responders.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to support **H7550** and recommend its passage.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Col. Michael J. Winquist". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Colonel Michael J. Winquist
Chief of Police
Cranston Police Department