

March 25, 2026

Honorable Carol Hagan McEntee  
Chair, House Committee on the Judiciary  
Rhode Island General Assembly  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: Support H 8106- Restrictive Covenants**

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

I am a constituent of Providence writing in support of H 8106, to reform laws on restrictive covenants.

Restrictive covenants limit where grocery stores can purchase space and often lead to food deserts. Food deserts are not just a matter of food access for the individual, but a matter of the financial strain on the State of Rhode Island's SNAP program. When food stores are limited, the stores in an area charge more. This is a major reason why restrictive covenants are supported by stores. But zip codes with some of the highest rates of poverty often correspond with the highest rates of SNAP participants and the highest rates of food deserts. One of those zip codes includes 02907, where I reside in Providence. Between having a full-time job and being a single parent of a five year old, going a longer distance to a grocery store isn't always feasible. The most reasonable option is to go to either of the two big-chain convenience stores at either end of my street. The prices there are high, the options for food are limited, and the nutritional value of this food is lacking. I do not qualify for SNAP, but for someone who relies on SNAP to feed your family, the options are not which grocery store to go to, but which meal to skip. As demand for funding and applications for SNAP increases, the RI Department of Health faces additional administrative and funding challenges in an already challenging time for revenue.

Restrictive receipts are unnecessary for the business aspect of major grocery stores. Market shares for major chain grocery stores are at record highs, particularly in Providence County, which has traditionally had the highest number of food deserts. But according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, grocery prices have risen by 2.3% percent in New England in the past year alone. The Economic Research Service is projecting grocery price increases up to 3% in the coming year nationwide. Grocery stores don't need restrictive covenants to succeed in business. We need food to stay alive.

Restrictive covenants don't just impact our grocery budget. When a grocery store closes, restrictive covenants often lead to unused, empty buildings, sometimes for a decade or more. This can decrease property values, and Rhode Island is already facing a growing housing crisis. When families are faced with food deserts increasing financial strain, they have problems paying for rent and mortgages. Restrictive covenants also lead to unused, empty buildings where grocery stores once stood. This decreases property value.

In addition, access to less nutritious food also leads to health concerns such as heart disease and diabetes. These concerns place additional strain on healthcare costs and the broader hospital system in Rhode Island. Ending restrictive receipts to promote a sustainable food economy must be a part of any quality of life conversation.

Reforming laws on restrictive covenants is an important step towards all Rhode islanders having access to good, affordable food and a better quality of life. I urge the committee to vote H-8106 favorably out of committee.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Phoenix Wheeler".

Phoenix Wheeler  
182 Adelaide Avenue #7  
Providence, RI 02907