



Memo To: House Labor Committee

From: Angela Lima, Policy and Advocacy Program Director, Women's Fund of Rhode Island

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Concerns: **SUPPORT FOR H-5304 COMMUTER TRANSPORTATION BENEFITS ACT**

We at the Women's Fund of Rhode Island stand in strong support of H-5304. This bill would require Rhode Island's largest employers to offer transit passes as a fringe benefit is a simple way to improve congestion, reduce emissions, and increase Rhode Island's competitiveness as a business-friendly destination.

Women make up 51% of the population in the state of Rhode Island and economic insecurity is at the root cause of many problems women and girls face in Rhode Island. Transportation is crucial for women because it directly impacts their access to education, employment, healthcare, and social opportunities, which are often limited by concerns about safety and accessibility on public transit, particularly when considering factors like frequent short trips for childcare or errands; essentially, safe and reliable transportation empowers women to participate fully in society and the economy.

The Women's Fund of Rhode Island would like to thank our legislative leadership in the house for providing critical funding during last year's budgetary investments to keep RIPTA's bus lines and employment thriving. This was a great first step in preserving our critical transportation sector but more innovation is needed.

The top 25 employers in Rhode Island employ a combined 101,800 people (Source: PBN). If even a fraction of those employees took transit, it would have a profound impact on RIPTA ridership, carbon emissions, and highway congestion.

The Women's Fund would also like to also highlight the many groups that have been impacted including small businesses and the hospitality industry that continues to be impacted by the 195 bridge. During a small business committee meeting held on 4/3/2024 these industries highlighted the many challenges that had impacted their businesses. These impacts stemmed from 3.2 million dollars in revenue losses, \$600,000 loss in workers tips, a reduction in workers schedule, a reduction in customer reservation, event bookings, and the logistics of delivering products. While small businesses have been doing their part in pivoting business practices to adapt with traffic on the 195 bridge there was also a specific ask in how businesses and legislation could come together for real time solutions.

We urge you to pass H-5304 As a member of the SAVE RIPTA coalition, we are helping to aid solutions that would result in the sustainability of our public transit systems, helping women, our businesses, carbon reduction, and less congestion related to the traffic.

The mission of the Women's Fund of Rhode Island is to invest in women and girls through advocacy, research, and strategic partnership designed to achieve gender equity through systemic change. Our [Women's Well-Being Index](#) compares how well women fare against men on topics related to health, safety, economic security, education and civic participation in every RI city/town. Our [policy briefs](#) are written in response to the data found on the Index. You can find more about our work at www.wfri.org.