

March 4, 2025

Dear Chair Corvese and Honorable Members
Of the House Labor Committee:

RE: House Bill 5304: The Commuter Transportation Benefits Act

I write to you today in support of House Bill 5304, which would mandate that employers with more than 500 employees offer RIPTA bus passes as well as parking as a commuter benefit to their employees.

I worked at Brown University from 2003 through 2021. While I was at Brown, the University provided access to RIPTA to all faculty, staff and students through our Brown University ID cards. Brown did this for a practical reason: parking on College Hill was difficult at best, and the University lacked sufficient parking on its campus to accommodate the vast majority of its employees, let alone students who might wish to bring a car to campus. We were encouraged by Brown administrators to use RIPTA in order to avoid the parking and congestion problems that too many cars in small spaces would inevitably create. So I have had direct experience of the benefits that HB5304 would provide to other workers.

. The benefits of having access to RIPTA as a Brown employee were enormous. I lived in Providence while I worked at Brown, and took RIPTA to and from work. While I liked to walk, the 2 mile walk from my home in the West End to the office where I worked sometimes felt a bit too far to walk twice in one day. I was grateful to have access to RIPTA for the ride home after a long day, as well as in the morning when I had to be sure to get to work early. I also used RIPTA for non-work activities: to go to medical appointments, to get to and from T. F. Green or the Amtrak station with my luggage, and to get to Newport and other locations for meetings, shopping and social events. Having access to RIPTA just made navigating Rhode Island easier, especially when parking at the places I wanted to get to would have been problematic.

One consequence of riding RIPTA was something that I had never anticipated: it was the sense of social connection with other Rhode Islanders. On the bus, I often encountered people I knew from work or work-related activities. Our bus ride gave us an impromptu chance to chat in ways we might not otherwise have done. In addition, it gave me the opportunity to gain greater understanding of my neighbors and the challenges they faced, either through casual conversation or simply via observation. Whether they were friendly bus drivers or other riders, I came away from some of these conversations with a vivid appreciation for the value of living in such a small and connected community.

Having had the option to use RIPTA to get to work was a good experience for me. It reduced the stress of getting to work, and made my commute home restful when I was tired. I encourage you to pass HB5304 to extend these benefits to other workers.

Sincerely yours,

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