

March 15, 2025

Honorable Representative Arthur Corvese, Chair
House Labor Committee
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903



Re: Support of H-5940, The Rhode Island Opportunity for Employee Ownership Act

Dear Chair Corvese,

Lefty Loosey Bicycle Collective is proud to express our wholehearted support for **H-5940**, the Rhode Island Opportunity for Employee Ownership Act. This legislation creates opportunities for small business owners to transfer ownership of businesses to their employees when the owner decides to sell. If passed, it could generate ownership and wealth-building opportunities for tens of thousands of Rhode Islanders while providing a strategy for Rhode Island to meet the challenges of thousands of small business owners retiring in coming years (a.k.a. ‘Silver Tsunami’). According to data compiled by Project Equity, 56% of small business owners in Rhode Island are over the age of 55. As increasing numbers of our state’s locally-owned small businesses approach points of transition, we see conversion to employee ownership as an ideal outcome to preserve community character, safeguard local ownership, and provide economic mobility opportunities to working Rhode Islanders.

Founded in 2020 in Providence, RI, Lefty Loosey Bicycle Collective is a worker-run community bike shop maintaining a space for teaching and learning, repair, redistribution, and joy. As an intentionally intergenerational community “third space,” much of our work is oriented around making bicycles and the knowledge of their repair more accessible to all - so that any Rhode Islander can confidently and safely ride a bike. We hold weekly open repair hours in our shop at 50 Sims Avenue, Providence, where anyone can bring their bicycle and get help fixing it from a skilled mechanic at no cost. We regularly refurbish and redistribute dozens of free bicycles through community-based partner organizations to those in our communities who are most marginalized, including clients of all ages at Clinica Esperanza, Project WEBER/Renew, and the Olneyville Neighborhood Association. And, we teach the fundamental mechanics of bike repair through our six-week class, which we run four or five times every year. Beyond our work with bicycles, we have hosted workshop series that include introductions to basic electrical work, sewing, power tools, and more. Our democratic, worker-run structure is fundamental to our ability to accomplish the breadth and depth of work we do. Lefty Loosey is a member of the Rhode Island Worker Cooperative Alliance, an organization representing worker cooperatives and support organizations throughout the state dedicated to building a democratic local economy by facilitating the creation, growth, and viability of worker cooperatives in and around Rhode Island.

House Bill 5940 represents a prudent investment for Rhode Island that would pay dividends for years to come. Research shows that support for worker cooperatives is an effective economic development strategy, building community resilience and creating sustainable, dignified jobs. According to a 2017 study from the National Center for Employee Ownership, wages are 33% higher, median job tenure is 53% longer, and net worth increases 92% when workers have an ownership interest in the organizations in which they work.

Despite these benefits, worker cooperatives represent a very small part of Rhode Island's economy. The RI Worker Cooperative Alliance (RIWCA) website lists only eleven companies incorporated as worker cooperatives in RI. Rhode Island is ripe for policy interventions that could quickly increase the number of worker owners in the state. House Bill 5940 is an important first step.

As such, we strongly urge the committee to move this bill forward. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us directly at hello@leftylooseybikecollective.org.

Sincerely,

Lefty Loosey Bike Collective members:

Chris Cervantes,
John Rosenwinkel,
Danny Cordova,
Shelby Mack,
Jon Stogner,
Ira Coolidge,
Eli Kauffman,
Zane Silva,
Bekah Moon,
Steve Ward,
Chelsea DeSantis,
Chris Perez-Lopes

cc: RI Worker Cooperative Alliance