

Dear Chair Corvese and Committee members,

My name is Mélodie Pimentel. I live in East Providence, and I am writing in **support** of the **Commuter Transportation Benefits Act (Bill H7363)**. I believe this bill will lower the barrier for those employed in our state to consider utilizing bus transportation for their daily commute. My personal experience with RIPTA's pilot program at the University of Rhode Island speaks directly to this.

For years, while pursuing my undergraduate degree at the University of Rhode Island, I commuted by car every day from East Providence to Kingston. While I enjoy driving — especially as a car enthusiast who specifically sought out a manual transmission vehicle — the long commute was eating into my budget due to the increasing cost of gas and maintenance, while also taking away valuable study time.

Thankfully, RIPTA and the University of Rhode Island launched a pilot program providing no-cost bus passes for students. While this differs slightly from the bill before you (employers are not required to subsidize the passes), it lowered the threshold for students to consider the bus. Prior to this program, I had never considered taking public transit to campus. However, after doing the math, I found that driving halfway to Wickford and then taking the bus saved me both fuel and time. I no longer had to search for parking on campus during peak hours, and I could leave my car parked safely in a covered garage.

The RIPTA pilot program saved me countless hours and enabled me to study during time I would have otherwise spent in bumper-to-bumper traffic. I believe my experience can be extrapolated to the bill before you: if we make it easier for residents to consider bus transportation, ridership will grow. This is vital, as current cuts may lead to a fiscal spiral where decreased service leads to lower ridership, which then justifies further cuts. This bill is a simple way to help break that cycle. While it will not solve the problem entirely, it is a productive first step.

I urge you to support H7363 to assist workers and increase revenue for RIPTA. This will provide Rhode Island employees with access to affordable transportation while growing the ridership base for public transit.

Sincerely,

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