



# RHODE ISLAND LIQUOR OPERATORS COLLABORATIVE

REPRESENTING RHODE ISLAND'S INDEPENDENT LIQUOR RETAILERS

## H7769, H7770, H7771 - OPPOSE

18 March 2026

Dear Chairman Corvese and Committee Members:

The Rhode Island Liquor Operators Collaborative opposes House Bills 7769, 7770, 7771.

Rhode Island's small, independent liquor retailers are proud to be part of the fabric of our communities. We employ local residents, support neighborhood initiatives, and serve as reliable, responsible businesses in a highly regulated marketplace. But as policymakers once again consider increases to the minimum wage, it is critical that they fully understand the unintended consequences such actions can have on small businesses operating on already razor-thin margins.

Unlike large, national chains, locally owned businesses do not have the luxury of scale. We cannot absorb rising labor costs by offsetting them through massive purchasing power. Every dollar matters. When the minimum wage rises, it doesn't just impact entry-level wages—it creates upward pressure across the entire payroll. Experienced employees expect—and deserve—wage adjustments as well, compounding the financial strain.

For many small retailers, payroll is already one of the largest operating expenses. Add to that increasing costs for utilities, insurance, compliance, and inventory, and the math becomes unsustainable. Business owners are then forced into difficult decisions: reduce employee hours, delay hiring, cut back on benefits, or in some cases, eliminate positions altogether. These are not hypothetical scenarios—they are real choices that directly affect Rhode Islanders trying to make a living.

There is also a broader economic ripple effect to consider. When small businesses are squeezed, prices often rise. Consumers ultimately bear the burden, particularly working families who are already navigating inflationary pressures. Additionally, higher labor costs can accelerate the shift toward automation or reduced service models, eroding the personalized customer experience that local retailers pride themselves on.

We all share the goal of ensuring workers earn fair wages. But policy must be balanced and thoughtful. Incremental, predictable changes—paired with relief measures for small businesses—are far more sustainable than aggressive increases that risk destabilizing the very employers who provide these jobs.

If we truly value Rhode Island's small business community, we must pursue solutions that support both employees and employers. Otherwise, we risk undermining the local businesses that anchor our neighborhoods and drive our state's economy.

Sincerely,

Nicholas A. Fede, Jr.

Executive Director

Rhode Island Liquor Operators Collaborative