

April 15, 2026

The Honorable Arthur J. Corvese, Chair
House Labor Committee
Rhode Island House of Representatives
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: HOUSE BILL 7041– AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- FIREFIGHTERS' ARBITRATION

Dear Chairman Corvese and Honorable Committee Members,

On behalf of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, we would like to begin by expressing our sincere appreciation for the dedication, professionalism, and hard work of our public safety personnel, including firefighters, who serve communities across Rhode Island with courage and commitment every day. Their service is essential to the safety and well-being of our residents, and municipalities remain firmly committed to supporting them.

At the same time, we are writing to express our concerns regarding House Bill 7041, which would provide that all contractual provisions in a firefighters' collective bargaining agreement continue in effect until a successor agreement has been reached or an interest arbitration award has been rendered. While we understand the intent behind this legislation, we believe it presents significant challenges to the fiscal health of municipalities and to responsible local governance.

House Bill 7041 would constrain municipal leaders during labor negotiations by effectively eliminating the natural expiration point of collective bargaining agreements. Removing contract expiration undermines the incentive for both parties to engage in timely and meaningful negotiations, potentially prolonging disputes and reducing the urgency needed to reach fair and efficient resolutions.

In addition, the proposed automatic continuation of contract terms does not adequately reflect the diverse financial realities faced by Rhode Island's cities and towns. While short-term extensions may be appropriate in certain circumstances to maintain stability during ongoing negotiations, a broad, one-size-fits-all requirement risks placing additional strain on municipalities already managing constrained budgets, rising personnel costs, and increasing pension and healthcare obligations.

Personnel costs remain the largest driver of municipal expenditures. Delays in reaching new agreements can contribute to fiscal uncertainty and may ultimately result in increased property tax burdens or reductions in essential public services that residents rely upon.

While the League recognizes and values the importance of strong and constructive labor relations, we believe House Bill 7041, as currently drafted, places an undue burden on municipalities and taxpayers. We remain committed to working with the sponsor and all stakeholders to explore balanced approaches that support fair collective bargaining while preserving fiscal responsibility and effective municipal governance.

The League appreciates the opportunity to provide comments and share our perspective with the committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. R. Rossi". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Randy" and last name "Rossi" clearly distinguishable.

Randy R. Rossi
Executive Director

Cc: Honorable Members of House Labor Committee