



March 28, 2024

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey  
Chairman House Municipal Government and Housing Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
82 Smith St  
Providence RI, 02903

RE: Bill Number: 7978 AN ACT RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES -- SUBDIVISION OF LAND

Dear Chairman Casey and Honorable Members of the House Municipal Government and Housing Committee:

I am writing to express our concerns regarding House Bill 7978, which seeks to build upon the platform established by the Rhode Island Department of Business Regulation for building permits, planning, and zoning applications. While I appreciate the intention of this legislation to enhance transparency and efficiency in these processes, I believe there are significant issues that need to be addressed, particularly concerning the potential financial burden it may impose on certain municipalities.

It has come to our attention, through feedback from our members, that House Bill 7978, as currently written, could result in unfunded mandates for cities and towns. Despite the original assertion that the legislation would not add any additional cost burden to municipalities, it appears that this may not be the case in practice.

For instance, I would like to highlight the concerns raised by the Town of Glocester. As outlined in their testimony, implementing e-permitting for planning applications would entail considerable monetary and staffing costs for the municipality. The initial setup and annual software and professional service fees associated with e-permitting, as demonstrated by their experience with OpenGov, present a substantial financial strain, especially for smaller municipalities with limited resources.

In the case of Glocester, the costs incurred for the building permit module alone amounted to over \$63,000 for FY 24, with additional annual maintenance expenses exceeding \$12,000. Given the relatively low volume of permits and applications processed by the town, such expenses pose a significant burden and may not justify the benefits of implementing e-permitting systems.

While we acknowledge the potential benefits of streamlining processes and utilizing technology to improve efficiency, it is crucial to ensure that these initiatives are implemented in a manner that is both feasible and equitable for all municipalities, regardless of size or resources available.

We respectfully ask that you to carefully consider the concerns raised by our members and the potential impact of House Bill 7978 on municipalities such as Charlestown, West Greenwich, and Portsmouth. I believe it is essential to explore options for mitigating any unintended financial burdens and ensuring that the legislation aligns with the needs and capabilities of all communities.

In conclusion, we ask that these issues be addressed in the final version of House Bill 7950 to ensure that it effectively balances the needs of developers with the interests and capabilities of local municipalities. Your willingness to consider our perspectives is greatly appreciated as we work together to address the needs and concerns of our communities.

On behalf of the League of Cities and Towns, we look forward to continuing our engagement on this important issue.

Sincerely,

David M. Bodah  
Associate Director

Cc: House Municipal Government and Housing Committee  
Ernie Almonte, Executive Director, RILCT