

# The Village Common of Rhode Island

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*Aging Better Together*

## HOUSE COMMITTEE ON MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT & HOUSING

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey, Chair

Testimony by H. Philip West Jr on March 20, 2025,

in support of 25-H 5803 by Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi, et. al.

### STATE BUILDING CODE — ELECTRONIC PERMITTING PLATFORMS

Thank you, Chairman Casey and members of the House Committee on Municipal Government & Housing for this hearing. **I testify in strong support for 25-H 5803 by Speaker Shekarchi, legislation that would establish and provide for the operation of electronic permitting platforms for building permits, zoning applications, planning applications, and permits for DEM, DOT, and CRMC.**

My name is H. Philip West, Jr., and I serve as a volunteer lobbyist on behalf of The Village Common of Rhode Island, a statewide non-profit that helps older adults live safely and independently in their homes. We coordinate volunteer services through locally organized and operated villages in Barrington, Burrillville, Cranston, Glocester, Middletown, Newport, Pawtucket, Portsmouth, Providence, Warwick, and Westerly. We are currently helping form new local villages in Bristol-Warren, Exeter, Cumberland, and Jamestown. The Village Common now has 525 members and 355 volunteers. **Our volunteers save lives and money. Our motto is: “Aging Better Together.”**

**We in the Village Common strongly support Speaker Shekarchi’s legislation to require that virtually all municipal and state permitting be moved from paper to electronic platforms.**

In my work with Common Cause Rhode Island during the early 1990s, I was deeply involved in efforts to help the General Assembly transfer the vast array of its bills, calendars, journals, lists, public laws, along with both the Rhode Island General Laws and the State Constitution, from paper to electronic formats.

Unless you were here when everything was on paper, there’s no way to imagine the struggle your predecessors and the public had to manage paper copies of original bills, SubAs, agendas, and all the rest. During the final days of each session, you would have seen piles of bills being collated and sorted in the hallways outside this room.

Many insisted that transforming to electronic formats could never work, that hackers would destroy data, and that publishers of the General Laws would refuse to print the familiar green volumes if people could download text electronically for free.

But in 1994, the chairmen of the two finance committees, Rep. Tony Pires and Sen. Mike Lenihan, sponsored identical bills to ensure online access to all the proceedings of the General Assembly. Together they announced that their top priority would be online access to legislative data: bills, amended bills, committee agendas, calendars, journals, public laws, and the Rhode Island General Laws. I don’t think it would have happened without those powerful and respected sponsors, but they got it done.

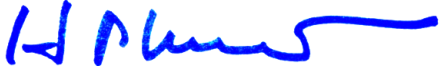
It took several years and a lot of careful work to create the system we take for granted now, but Rhode Island became one of the first states — right after California — to get that done.

**With Speaker Shekarchi and many of you in the House leadership committed to statewide electronic permitting, you will get this done, and it will make an almost unimaginable difference for everyone in Rhode Island.**

**On behalf of The Village Common, I urge the Committee on Municipal Government and Housing to recommend 25-H 5803 for passage by the full House. The State of Rhode Island, with cooperation from all of its cities and towns, will create a transparent permitting system. Years from now, people will wonder how anything got built before this transformation.**

**Thank you, and congratulations.**

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'H. Philip West Jr.', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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