



March 5, 2026

The Honorable K. Joseph Shekarchi
Speaker of the House
Rhode Island House of Representatives
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Speaker Shekarchi and Members of the House Municipal Government & Housing Committee,

I write to express my opposition to the proposed amendment to the Rhode Island Homeless Bill of Rights (2026 – H8000), which would require municipalities to provide a mandatory fifteen-day written notice prior to the removal or relocation of encampments located on public property.

The City of Cranston recognizes that homelessness is a complex and deeply human issue that requires compassion, outreach, and coordination with service providers. Our police department regularly works with clinicians and outreach professionals to connect individuals experiencing homelessness with services, treatment options, and shelter resources whenever possible. Our goal is always to resolve these situations humanely while also maintaining safe and accessible public spaces for the entire community.

However, the proposed legislation presents several significant logistical and operational concerns that would make implementation extremely difficult at the municipal level.

First, the transient nature of encampments creates a practical challenge when attempting to apply a fixed notice period. Encampments frequently change occupants. Individuals may vacate an area but leave the encampment behind, or new individuals may arrive shortly afterward. As a result, it is often unclear whether a camp is actively occupied at any given time. Officers frequently return to the same location multiple times because activity is sporadic and schedules are unpredictable. In many cases, by the time a notice period expires, the individuals originally occupying the encampment may no longer be present, while new individuals may have taken their place.

Second, the bill requires notice to be provided to “local homelessness outreach agencies,” a term that is not clearly defined in the legislation. In practice, Cranston Police already connect individuals with services by involving the department’s contracted clinicians and directing individuals to available outreach resources before any enforcement action occurs. Without clear statutory guidance, this requirement could create uncertainty about compliance and expose municipalities to unnecessary liability.

Third, the bill creates practical enforcement challenges that could unintentionally escalate situations that are currently handled informally and with flexibility. In order to document and track individuals over a fifteen-day notice period, officers would likely need to positively identify individuals at the first point of contact to determine who is occupying the encampment. That process can trigger warrant checks and other investigative procedures that may lead to arrests unrelated to the original encounter. In many cases, officers currently attempt to resolve these situations through conversation and voluntary relocation without initiating that level of enforcement. The proposed legislation could unintentionally push interactions in the opposite direction.

The proposal also raises questions about how the notice requirement would apply in locations where camping is otherwise restricted or regulated. For example, Rhode Island has state-operated campgrounds such as Fishermen's Memorial State Park in Narragansett, where campsites must be reserved well in advance and are often booked up to two years ahead. Under the framework proposed in this bill, it is unclear whether individuals could establish an encampment in such locations and then remain there for a mandatory fifteen-day notice period before removal. That scenario highlights the ambiguity in how the law would interact with existing public land management policies and raises concerns about unintended consequences.

Our administration believes strongly in treating every person with dignity and connecting individuals experiencing homelessness with services whenever possible. At the same time, the operational realities faced by municipal police departments and public works teams must be considered when crafting statewide policy.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the General Assembly to reconsider the proposed amendment or work with municipal leaders and law enforcement agencies to develop a more practical approach that supports outreach efforts while allowing cities and towns to maintain safe and accessible public spaces.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Kenneth J. Hopkins
Mayor
City of Cranston