



March 24, 2026

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey, Chair
House Municipal Government and Housing
Rhode Island House of Representatives
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: House Bill 7149 – AN ACT RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES -- RELIEF OF INJURED AND DECEASED FIRE FIGHTERS AND POLICE OFFICERS

Dear Chair Casey and Honorable Committee Members,

On behalf of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, we appreciate the Committee's continued focus on supporting our public safety personnel. We recognize the intent of House Bill 7149 to expand access to benefits for first responders, including in circumstances involving off-duty intervention. Ensuring that those who serve our communities are supported when they are injured or otherwise unable to perform their duties is a goal we strongly share.

At the same time, it is essential that the legislation includes clear guardrails to support effective and sustainable implementation at the municipal level. Expanding eligibility for injured-on-duty and accidental disability benefits, particularly for off-duty incidents, has the potential to create significant financial and administrative responsibilities for cities, towns, and fire districts. Municipalities must often continue salaries and benefits while employees are incapacitated, and without clear parameters, these obligations could strain local budgets and long-term planning.

Municipalities would also be responsible for administering aspects of this framework, including processing documentation, verifying claims, and coordinating with medical professionals and state entities. For smaller municipalities with limited administrative capacity, these added responsibilities highlight the importance of clear standards, defined processes, and consistent guidance to ensure uniform application of the law.

The issue of jurisdiction is particularly important. Firefighters frequently respond outside their home municipality through established mutual aid agreements and regional response systems, which provides a clear framework for responsibility. Police officers, however, generally do not have statewide authority, and off-duty interventions outside their municipality can create uncertainty about which entity bears responsibility for benefits, oversight, and claim administration. Providing clear statutory guidance on jurisdictional responsibilities is critical to avoid confusion, ensure timely support for employees, and prevent unintended burdens on municipalities.

The League strongly supports efforts to provide meaningful support to our public safety personnel. We stand ready to work with the sponsor to ensure that the goals of this legislation are achieved in a manner that also provides the structure, clarity, and guardrails necessary for municipalities to implement and sustain these benefits effectively.

Thank you for allowing us to present our perspective.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. R. Rossi". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and a smaller "R" and "Rossi" following.

Randy R. Rossi
Executive Director

Cc: Honorable Members of House Municipal Government and Housing