

To: Representative Stephen M. Casey, Chair, and members of the House Municipal Government and Housing Committee Members

From: Bernie Beaudreau, Community Volunteer, unaffiliated - Rumford, RI

Date: March 30, 2026

Re: Support for H-8220 Homelessness Employment Program

I wish to express my strong support for H-8220, the Homelessness Employment Program. I have met many homeless individuals who are looking to be employed but feel discriminated against because of their visible signs of homelessness and lapse in their employment history. Many also don't feel ready for regular employment and would benefit from this public employment program to adapt to a daily work schedule.

As part of their recovery from homelessness, gainful employment experiences such as those proposed by this bill, will increase long-term employability, work place socialization and the development of new skills and confidence. *It is very important that the intended work projects have real public value and provide useful, meaningful benefits to the public health, safety, and quality of life of Rhode Island communities.*

While the Rhode Island minimum wage in 2026 is \$16/hour and in 2027 will be \$17/hour, I ask that the members of the Committee approve a compensation schedule of \$18/hour in 2026 and \$19/hour in 2027, \$2/hour above minimum in order to reflect the public value of this program's work while providing compensation closer to living wage.

Throughout my public service career, I have organized and managed many group work projects ranging from cleaning up ponds and public parks, beautifying public spaces, partnering with corporate volunteer groups to renovate urban public schools and implementing recovery efforts after hurricanes and floods. I have seen the benefits to participants working in groups on projects that provide a common good for the community. Beyond the actual labor benefits, participants feel great about investing and contributing positively to their community. Homeless folks welcome the opportunity to contribute to the community in positive ways.