



Town of South Kingstown, Rhode Island

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Jay G. Wegimont
Town Council Member

June 10, 2025

Good afternoon Chairwoman McEntee and members of the committee,

My name is Jay Wegimont, and I proudly serve on the South Kingstown Town Council. Thank you, Chairwoman McEntee, for bringing this bill forward today, and for your thoughtful leadership on behalf of small businesses.

I want to extend special thanks to our South Kingstown Representatives—Chairwoman McEntee, Kathy Fogarty, Tina Spears, and Teresa Tanzi—for co-sponsoring this important legislation and for always advocating for our coastal communities. I'd also like to thank Leader Blazejewski and Representatives Spears, Cotter, Craven, and Carson for co-sponsoring this commonsense and timely proposal.

House Bill 6392 is straightforward, practical, and deeply needed. It allows food service establishments to temporarily operate outdoors when their buildings are rendered uninhabitable by fire, flood, or another emergency. The provision is limited to 18 months and sunsets in 2027—it's about short-term flexibility, not permanent changes.

For South Kingstown, this bill hits home. Just last week, the Matunuck Oyster Bar—a major local employer and one of our most recognized businesses—suffered a structural emergency that shut down its primary indoor dining area. Thankfully, no one was hurt, but the impact could have been devastating during peak season.

Our Town Council responded quickly and unanimously approved emergency language to allow temporary outdoor dining. I was proud to support it. And I'm here today because we need the state to back us up with the same level of responsiveness.

As WJAR reported this week, this situation isn't just about one restaurant—it's about preserving jobs, supporting small business owners, and helping communities respond to crisis with flexibility and fairness.

Matunuck Oyster Bar employs dozens of local residents, supports Rhode Island aquaculture, and contributes to our year-round economy. If a small business is forced to close due to circumstances outside of its control, we should be helping—not holding them back with outdated barriers.

H6392 ensures that cities and towns can act quickly to protect livelihoods. It reflects smart governance, strong values, and a shared commitment to keeping Rhode Island's small businesses thriving.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. I respectfully urge you to support this bill.

Sincerely,

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