



**RHODE ISLAND SENIOR CENTER  
DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION**  
ADVOCACY AND SERVICE

February 6, 2023

Dear House Committee Members:

**Re: SUPPORT FOR H-5266**

My name is Robert N. Robillard Jr., LMHC and I am the President of the Rhode Island Senior Center Directors Association. It is with great honor that I speak in support for House Bill H-5266. The bill amends the Open Meetings law to provide "that a member of a public body who is age sixty-five (65) or over may participate by use of electronic communication or telephone communication. It is intended to promote civic participation by older persons who are challenged to attend meetings in person for a number of reasons (ex. transportation issues, fear of being in public places due to COVID and other viruses and accessibility needs).

The current requirement to participate in person serves to disenfranchise many older persons who may want to wish to serve on boards, commissions and councils to share their expertise but are prevented from doing so. We also lose out from benefiting from the knowledge and experiences that older persons can contribute to public policy discussions.

Our organization represents 34 centers across our great state. We believe that the need for equitable, accessible and inclusionary options for some of our most "at-risk" individuals is not only a necessity but is respectful in its intent and increases the volume of elder voices being heard in our state.

I thank you for the opportunity to support this important nuance in the opening meetings law. It can open the door to increased dialogue and connection in civic participation for many we serve.

Sincerely,

Robert N. Robillard Jr., LMHC  
President