



Vincent Marzullo, Founder

USA Compassion Corps

28 Crossland Road

West Warwick, RI 02893

401-486-6404

Daily acts of compassion strengthen social unity.

Date: February 7, 2023

TO: The Honorable Evan P. Shanley
Chair, House State Government & Elections Committee

Members, House Finance Committee

STATEMENT OF Vincent Marzullo in SUPPORT OF H5266

I want to thank the members of the House State Government & Elections Committee for this opportunity to voice my support for the recently submitted legislation (H5266) to permit all members of a public body who are aged 65 years or older to participate in public meeting by telephone or electronic communication. With the lessons learned over the past 3 years and the devastating impact of COVID on our older adults, it's essential that we reexamine how older adults can contribute their life experiences to public policy making.

A review of the demographic data underscores the growth in our aging community. Rhode Island's total population of 65 years and older has grown by 20% from 152,183 in 2010 to 182,486 in 2020 (US Census Bureau) – (and by 2030 one-quarter of our population will be over 65). Of this total, we have seen a 10% increase of those living alone from 48,464 individuals to 53,281.

The voices of seniors, particularly those living alone, must be heard and the barriers for their participation and input must also be removed. This legislation is an opportunity for Rhode Island to state that older adults are valued, needed, and can continue to be purposeful.

As the former federal National Service & Senior Corps Administrator for Rhode Island, I witnessed and supported thousands of seniors making a difference as RSVP volunteers, Foster Grandparents, and Senior Companions. They have and continue to make a difference in our communities and the lives of children, families, and the vulnerable.

Don't we want the full benefit of their wisdom and service in our public policy making? I respectfully urge you to support H5266 and issue a greater call for public engagement of our older adults. I'm also available to this Committee and legislative staff to be of assistance in any way that would aid this legislative approach. Again, thank you for your willingness to make our state a more "age friendly" place to live.

By Vincent Marzullo - a current volunteer with the RI Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) and Hasbro Children's Hospital. For 31 years, Vin served as a federal civil rights and social justice Director in RI for the Corporation for National & Community Service. He is a previous Chair of the RI Federal Executive Council and the President Emeritus of AARP RI. Deployed several times as a Federal Disaster Cadre Coordinator when Presidential Disaster Declarations were issued, he supervised AmeriCorps ground support and long-term recovery assistance to aid FEMA response operations to State/local governments. Vin served three Rhode Island Governors and is the Founder of USA Compassion Corps.