

Steven Sepe

From: Mary Alice Smith <maryalicesmith4@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 12, 2025 12:20 PM
To: House State Government and Elections Committee
Cc: Rep. Carson, Lauren H.; Lauren Carson
Subject: H5719 ENTITLED, AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- OLDER ADULTS AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

TO: MEMBERS, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS

As an older adult and as a member of a grassroots non-profit organization working to improve the quality of life for older adults in Rhode Island, The Village Common of Rhode Island, I'm writing in support of H5719.

First, Rep. Carson's bill addresses common language used to describe older adults and people with disabilities that stereotypes people and leads to disrespect. Her bill would require that state statutes be updated to reflect more respectful and appropriate terminology, which I support.

Second, this bill would establish a permanent legislative oversight commission on aging Rhode Islanders. to study current services and coordination of state programs for older adult Rhode Islanders.

Our Aquidneck Island Village is a community organization of members and volunteers working together to enhance the experience of growing older in Newport, Middletown and Portsmouth. Along with other local villages across the state, we make up The Village Common of Rhode Island (TVCRI). Our aim is to help older adults on Aquidneck Island live their lives to the fullest – active, independent and connected – while staying in their own homes and communities.

Our island village is truly a grassroots effort of neighbors and friends deciding this is one small way we can make a difference in our community. We realized from our own experiences that many older adults could use a little help handling the challenges of aging, whether they live alone – or with a partner – when they can't quite manage all that they used to. Villages organize a network of mutual support – friends and neighbors willing to volunteer their time and talents to help one another.

Since we organized a village to serve Aquidneck Island older adults nine months ago, we've become acutely aware of the fragmentation of services and the difficulties older adults and their families have in accessing services. The needs of older adults are only going to grow as Rhode Island's population continues to age. We are seeing the needs of folks in their 80's and 90's who want to remain in their homes but find it difficult because of the lack of transportation and some help with household chores and repairs. We are particularly aware of the social isolation many experience.

Since our inception, we've provided 154 services for older adults, including 135 rides. Transportation for medical appointments and shopping turns out to be our highest demand service, accounting for 86 % of completed service requests. We've also helped with minor household jobs and provided tech support with computers, cellphones and TVs.

We've learned that when people can no longer drive or have mobility issues, they have intensive needs for transportation, often calling for several rides a week. There are few local options for obtaining rides except to pay for a cab or Lyft or Uber, which can be prohibitively expensive. AIV volunteers help fill this need.

Aquidneck Island Village now has 57 trained and vetted volunteers to assist our 56 members. All our volunteers must pass a national background check as we serve a vulnerable population.

The State of Rhode Island has determined that people have a better quality of life and the cost of care is less when they can remain in their own homes rather than in assisted living or a nursing home. Rhode Island needs to make this

commission permanent to bring all the parties to the table to work on coordination of services and to provide better information about those services to older adults and their families.

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