

HB-5523
PUC
Concern



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
Public Utilities Commission

89 Jefferson Boulevard
Warwick, Rhode Island 02888
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Chairman Ronald T. Gerwatowski
Commissioner Abigail Anthony

April 22, 2025

The Honorable Evan P. Shanley
Chair, House State Government
& Elections Committee
State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: House Bill 5523 – Open Meeting Translation Services

Dear Chair Shanley:

The Public Utilities Commission (PUC) submits these comments on House Bill 5523, which would require public bodies to develop a translation assistance plan to ensure that all open meetings of said bodies shall have the proceedings accessible to an individual in a language they understand, upon request. The PUC appreciates the goal of making government proceedings more accessible to the public by removing language barriers.

As a practical matter, however, because of the breadth of the bill's requirement it will likely be difficult to find qualified translation services for the types of technical hearings the PUC routinely holds. Providing such translation services during a public comment hearing where multiple interpreters may be needed could also pose a challenge. We have not analyzed the cost of compliance, but we do not believe current software technology would be sufficient or workable for many of our proceedings.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions at 401-780-2147 or cynthia.wilsonfrias@puc.ri.gov.

Sincerely,

Cynthia G. Wilson-Frias
Chief of Legal Services

cc: Representative Felix