

March 19, 2026

Dear Steven Sepe,

We are writing this letter in support of H7995 which creates the Office of the Elder Advocate.

My wife Janet and I are retired older adults with almost one hundred combined years of experience working with older adult populations. Over the years we realize that older adults have unique strengths, abilities, needs, and desires. Over the course of one's life many will interact with complex health care systems, seek housing, establish income support, navigate transportation, and may have advancing needs for community support.

Unfortunately, there may be times when older adults may get caught in conflict, exploitation, system redesigns, or seek resolution, when confronted with ageism or discrimination. They may face challenges in navigating our complex support systems to ensure their dignity and voice is heard in service access decisions. There are multiple states agencies or organizations available to assist, but none of them are independent or autonomous; especially when advocacy is needed for individuals lacking local family support or facing cognitive challenges as they age.

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman provides advocacy to assist residents in nursing homes or assisted living, the Mental Health Advocate supports individuals with behavioral health issues, while the Office of Health Aging provides protective services. The population supported by these advocates is both confined and limited.

Most of the 200,000 plus older adults in Rhode don't meet the necessary criteria to access these advocates and are living in the community.

They too need a voice.

Someone needs to monitor, evaluate and advocate for rights to those services and supports that older adults obtain. Someone needs to provide legal assistance and protect their civil rights. Someone needs to help those who have no one else available. That someone should be an Older Adult Advocate, who is independent and autonomous from any other agency.

Puerto Rico has an Elder People Advocate Office (Oficina del Procurador de las Personas de Edad Avanzada, or OPPEA). Several providences in Canda (British Columbia, Newfoundland, and New Brunswick) thought it necessary to pass legislation to establish an older adult advocate. Now is the time for Rhode Island to follow suit.

Sincerely



Frank Spinelli

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Janet Spinelli