



March 18, 2026

Dear Chairman Shanley & Members of the Committee on State Government and Elections

RE: H7995

I write to support H7995 to create an Office of Elder Advocate and thank Rep. Solomon for introducing this forward-looking bill aimed at protecting the rights of our state's older adults.

I have been involved with aging policy in Rhode Island for many years from serving in the legislature in the 1980's to my role as Director of Elderly Affairs in the 1990's when it was a cabinet level department and the ten years I managed the Long Term Care Coordinating Council.

Looking back over these years we have seen an amazing demographic shift. From 2010 to 2024 there was a 67,500 increase of persons age 65 here in our state (ACS Tables S0103). This age group, the fastest growing in the state, is projected to comprise one out of four persons by 2030! They deserve an independent advocate acting on their behalf.

Despite the dramatic increase in the number of our older adults, the resources to provide support programs and services, especially for our older adults living in the community, have been constrained. Services are often fragmented with agencies not always in alignment and often competing for resources. The result is too many vulnerable older adults fall through the cracks. Older patients languish in acute care hospitals for months and, in some cases for a year due to a lack of appropriate alternatives and legal representation. The Office of Healthy Aging has a volunteer guardian program but it has a huge backlog and only helps with guardian of the person and those living in institutions. OHA has no staff attorney to represent individual older adults with complex issues related to guardianship, property rights or benefit denials. We do have an excellent long term care ombudsman program but it only deals with persons receiving long term services.

Some question the need for an Office of Elder Advocate when we have the Office of Healthy Aging. I want to be clear – the proposed Office of Elder Advocate is not intended to duplicate the Office of Healthy Aging. OHA has not had an attorney on staff for several years and, even if the funding the Governor has proposed in his FY2027 budget to support a part-time attorney to assist with the Volunteer Guardianship program and other legal tasks, that would be insufficient to carry out the responsibilities detailed for the Office Elder Advocate including representing individual older adults in courts or administrative hearings in order to protect their rights. Nor, would such a part-time staff attorney have the independence needed to advocate for older adults in a systemic and holistic way free of bureaucratic challenges that too often impede action.

Thank you for your consideration of my support for H7995.

Sincerely,
Maureen Maigret