



Distinctive Communities
Powerful Alliance

January 29, 2026

The Honorable Susan R. Donovan, Chair
House Health and Human Services Committee
Rhode Island House of Representatives
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: BILL NUMBER H-7186 – AN ACT RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- NOTIFICATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS, POLICE OFFICERS AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIANS AFTER EXPOSURE TO INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Dear Chair Donovan and Honorable Committee Members,

On behalf of Rhode Island's cities and towns, we would like to express our appreciation for the intent of House Bill 7186, which seeks to ensure that our first responders receive the necessary protection and benefits when exposed to infectious diseases, including COVID-19. The health and safety of our firefighters, police officers, and emergency medical personnel are of paramount importance, and we recognize the essential role they play in protecting our communities, often at great personal risk.

While we strongly support efforts to safeguard public safety personnel, we respectfully bring forward concerns regarding the potential fiscal and administrative impact of this legislation on municipal governments. Expanding the definition of occupational disability to include COVID-19 could significantly increase costs for cities and towns, particularly in the areas of Injured on Duty (IOD), disability pensions, and other related benefits. Many municipalities are already facing financial constraints, and an increase in mandated expenditures without a corresponding source of funding may strain local budgets and potentially impact other critical services.

Additionally, clarification is needed regarding the process for determining exposure, particularly in the case of community spread. Unlike other infectious diseases that are largely limited to occupational settings, COVID-19 transmission is widespread in public environments, making it difficult to establish direct workplace exposure in some cases. A well-defined standard for determining eligibility would help ensure fairness and consistency in the application of benefits.

We appreciate the General Assembly's commitment to supporting our first responders and encourage continued discussions with municipal stakeholders to explore ways to provide necessary protection while also considering the fiscal realities faced by Rhode Island's cities and towns. We stand ready to work with the bill's sponsor and all stakeholders to refine this legislation in a way that best serves both our municipalities and our public safety personnel.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to reach out should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that appears to read "Randy R. Rossi".

Randy R. Rossi
Executive Director

Cc: Honorable Members of House Health and Human Services Committee