

RIALA
2253 Pawtucket Ave,
East Providence, RI 02914



March 19th, 2026

The Honorable Susan Donovan
Chair, House Health & Human Services Committee
State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Opposition to H7624, March 19th, 2026, House Health & Human Services Hearing

Dear Chairwoman Donovan:

On behalf of the Rhode Island Assisted Living Association (RIALA), I respectfully submit testimony in opposition to the proposed amendment requiring an annual unannounced, on-site inspection of assisted living residences that operate Alzheimer's special care units, with the inspection covering the entire residence.

Let me be clear at the outset: RIALA and its members support strong oversight, accountability, and transparency. We are not opposed to inspection. In fact, assisted living communities in Rhode Island are already subject to significant and ongoing regulatory review. Under current law, all licensed assisted living residences are subject to biennial unannounced, on-site inspections by the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH). With approximately 64 licensed assisted living communities in the state, that means roughly 32 full surveys are conducted annually, an average of nearly three per month statewide.

However, those biennial surveys represent only a portion of the Department's oversight activity. In the past year alone, there were an additional 171 in-person inspection visits conducted by RIDOH in assisted living communities in response to complaints, incidents, or other regulatory triggers. Combined with the scheduled surveys, that equates to 203 on-site visits across 64 communities, an average of approximately 3.2 Department visits per community per year.

While these 171 additional visits may not all be full surveys, once RIDOH is present in a building, the scope of review is not limited. Care plans, medication management practices, dietary services, staffing documentation, and regulatory compliance can all be reviewed. The Department's authority is broad and comprehensive.

From our perspective, this bill appears to be based on regulatory language without a full appreciation of the operational realities of oversight in Rhode Island. At one time, regulations required annual surveys. That requirement was changed, not at the request of providers, but because RIDOH could not sustain that level of activity given staffing and resource constraints.

Mandating annual unannounced inspections for Alzheimer's special care units would significantly increase the Department's workload. More importantly, it risks shifting

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RIDOH's focus away from its current risk-based, complaint-driven prioritization model. Today, when serious concern arises in a community, RIDOH has the flexibility to respond quickly and allocate resources where they are most urgently needed. Requiring additional annual inspections, regardless of compliance history or risk profile, may dilute that responsiveness.

We are not opposing this bill because of the direct burden it would impose on assisted living communities. Our concern is the indirect consequences. If inspection resources are stretched thinner, communities facing urgent issues may experience slower response times. A system that currently prioritizes immediate risk could become more schedule-driven than risk-driven.

It is also important to note that dementia care communities already operate under enhanced licensure requirements. These residences must meet specific standards related to staffing, environment, and training that reflect the needs of residents living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. The regulatory framework already recognizes their higher acuity and imposes appropriate safeguards.

At a time when Alzheimer's disease continues to affect thousands of Rhode Islanders and families are seeking appropriate, specialized care settings, we should be cautious about creating regulatory structures that unintentionally discourage providers from offering Alzheimer's special care services.

RIALA supports oversight. We support transparency. We support accountability. What we respectfully question is whether a blanket annual inspection mandate, added on top of existing surveys and more than 170 additional in-person visits per year, is the most effective or efficient way to protect residents.

If the Committee believes additional oversight is warranted, we would strongly encourage a discussion about ensuring RIDOH is adequately resourced to carry out that mission without compromising its ability to respond to complaints and emergent concerns. A well-funded, risk-based oversight model will better serve residents than a statutory increase in required inspection frequency alone.

For these reasons, RIALA respectfully requests that the Committee reconsider or hold this bill for further study.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and for your continued commitment to protecting Rhode Island's most vulnerable residents.