



## **BUILDING MOMENTUM**

Dynamic Communities,  
Stronger Rhode Island

---

# **LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

---

# **2026**

---



**RHODE ISLAND LEAGUE**  
OF CITIES AND TOWNS



## **RHODE ISLAND LEAGUE OF CITIES AND TOWNS**

### **DISTINCTIVE COMMUNITIES, POWERFUL ALLIANCE**

As the collective voice for all 39 cities and towns, the Rhode Island League of Cities & Towns brings deep insight into the challenges facing municipalities and their residents. Through convening local officials, fostering collaboration, and working closely with the Governor and General Assembly, the League helps to shape and advance solutions that strengthen communities and the residents they serve.

#### **AS AN ORGANIZATION, WE BELIEVE IN:**

- Sustaining strong municipal aid, education aid, and grant programs to ensure municipalities have the resources necessary to serve residents.
- Providing expanded, diversified revenue-generating tools for local governments.
- Advancing fully funded state policy initiatives, particularly those with workforce or personnel implications.
- Supporting policies that recognize the unique needs of each of Rhode Island's 39 communities and avoid uniform, prescriptive approaches in key areas such as land use and business licensing.
- Upholding the principle of local control to ensure decisions reflect individual community needs and priorities.
- Encouraging increased flexibility for local governments to innovate and enhance operational efficiency while reducing taxpayer burdens.

# EDUCATION FUNDING

Education spending remains the single largest expenditure in local budgets and is essential to the success of our communities. Now that the education funding formula's phase-in period has concluded, we appreciate the state's continued commitment to supporting schools. As conversations advance on changes to the formula, we offer the following recommendations:



## Strengthen the State Funding

**Formula:** Rhode Island's current education funding structure requires realignment to better match the needs of students and ensure predictability for cities and towns. The final report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Education Funding will play a critical role in shaping the next phase of reforms and advancing a more equitable, sustainable framework for every community.

## Fully Support Categorical Program

**Funding:** Critical services like high-cost special education, career and technical

education, and transportation are not built into the education funding formula and must be funded each year through separate appropriations. This creates instability for municipal budgets. As high-cost special education needs grow and transportation costs escalate, predictable and fully funded categorical programs are vital for communities.

**Institute Statewide Transportation Improvements:** On April 16, 2025, the Joint Legislative Commission to Study Student Transportation Needs and System Costs submitted its final report to the General Assembly, outlining a comprehensive set of recommendations to improve the efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and reliability of student transportation statewide. Several measures have already been enacted, including an increase in the maximum school van size from 8 to 10 passengers, an adjustment intended to improve route flexibility, and a temporary CDL credential waiver for Massachusetts and Connecticut drivers to help alleviate Rhode Island's ongoing school bus driver shortages and broaden vendor competition.

Other recommendations in the report - such as updating and consolidating transportation regions, improving routing efficiency, and expanding statewide transportation services to include certain in-district routes - would significantly improve transportation logistics and costs. Municipalities support legislation that reforms the current system and addresses these items.

**Increase the state share of teacher pension contributions:** Rhode Island's municipalities shoulder the majority of teacher pension costs, contributing 60% compared to the state's 40%. This imbalance makes Rhode Island one of only two states in New England where the state does not fund the full required contribution. Increasing the state share would improve parity with our neighboring states and reduce pressure on local property taxpayers.

The League recognizes and appreciates the work of Governor McKee and the General Assembly to confront long-standing education funding challenges. However, our members continue to express concerns regarding the fairness and overall integrity of the current Education Funding Formula. We are committed to collaborating with state and local partners to build a funding system that is equitable, transparent, and sustainable for all Rhode Islanders.



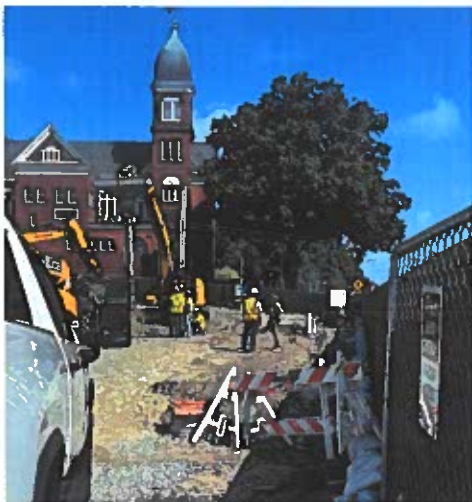
---

## LAND USE AND ZONING

As the League looks ahead to the next legislative session, it remains steadfast in advocating for the preservation of local authority over zoning and land-use decisions, ensuring that planning continues to reflect the distinct character, infrastructure capacity, environmental conditions, and strategic priorities of each Rhode Island community. Municipal leaders emphasize that cities and towns are best equipped to evaluate how new development aligns with local infrastructure—from water and sewer capacity to school enrollment, public safety resources, road networks, and climate resilience.

While local authority is essential, municipal officials strongly support continued collaboration with the state to expand housing opportunities, rehabilitate aging structures, simplify development review processes, and coordinate infrastructure investments. Enhanced state support is critical in areas such as permitting modernization, workforce development for planners and inspectors, technical assistance for complex projects, and funding to address water, sewer, stormwater, and transportation constraints that often delay housing.

A balanced approach, protecting local autonomy while strengthening coordinated state and local efforts, will be vital to addressing Rhode Island's housing needs, improving development outcomes, and ensuring that solutions are workable for communities of all sizes and capacities.



---

## HOUSING

**Support for Responsible Housing Development** – Municipal leaders strongly support the development of responsible and well-planned housing to meet the needs of Rhode Islanders. Cities and towns have collaborated with policymakers, nonprofit partners, developers, and community stakeholders to expand housing opportunities and ensure access for residents across all income levels, which has resulted in thousands of units being approved and built in our communities. The League has actively supported initiatives such as the Land-Use and Housing Affordability Study Commissions, which are designed to identify effective strategies to help municipalities meet their obligations under the Low- and Moderate-Income Housing Act while strengthening community capacity.

These efforts reflect a broader statewide action to align municipal actions with Rhode Island's housing goals — increasing affordability, encouraging redevelopment of existing properties, and promoting balanced growth that respects local character and infrastructure constraints. By working together, state and local partners can advance housing development that is both responsive to community needs and consistent with long-term planning priorities, ensuring that every Rhode Islander has the opportunity to find safe, stable, and attainable housing.

To address housing challenges and support Rhode Island municipalities in meeting state and community needs, cities and towns require the following:

### **Innovative Solutions for Homelessness**

Municipalities need clear, actionable strategies and adequate state funding to address homelessness—particularly during the winter months when the demand for shelter and supportive services increases.

### **Increased Infrastructure Funding**

Local leaders require infrastructure investments beyond federal aid to repair, upgrade, and expand essential systems that frequently limit housing development, including water, sewer, and stormwater infrastructure.

### **Preservation of Community Identity**

Efforts to expand housing must respect local decision-making in land use to preserve each community's unique character, quality of life, and long-term planning goals.

### **Support for Modernization**

Cities and towns need funding to modernize permitting, planning, and inspection systems that streamline housing processes and improve operational efficiency.

### **Technical and Financial Assistance**

State agencies, such as the Division of Statewide Planning and the Department of Housing, require sufficient resources to support municipal housing growth. Enhanced technical assistance for local governments is essential.

### **Workforce Development**

Expanding the pipeline of municipal planners, building officials, zoning staff, and inspectors is critical as local governments face growing administrative and compliance responsibilities.

### **Adequate State and Education Aid**

Municipalities need reliable state and education funding to support the diverse needs of residents, including public education, public safety, and community services.

### **Reliable Transportation Access**

Extending urban service boundaries and improving transportation infrastructure will better connect residents to jobs, housing, and economic opportunities.





## FUNDING FOR TRANSPORTATION, INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESILIENCY

**Maintain Funding for the Municipal Road Program** – The Municipal Road Program, created in FY 2024 and strengthened in FY 2025 and FY 2026, provides vital support to cities and towns working to repair, maintain, and modernize their local transportation infrastructure. Rhode Island’s municipalities are responsible for the majority of the state’s road network, yet funding has historically fallen short of what is needed to address aging pavement, bridges, sidewalks, and stormwater systems. The League has consistently advocated for a funding model comparable to the Chapter 90 programs used in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania, where annual allocations to municipalities are determined by local road mileage and population—providing predictability, equity, and transparency. Maintaining and expanding this investment is essential to ensuring safe, reliable, and resilient local roads, supporting economic activity, and improving mobility for residents, businesses, and visitors.

**Allocate Funds to the Municipal Infrastructure Grant Program** – The Municipal Infrastructure Grant Program was established by the 2018 General Assembly to assist cities and towns with the infrastructure upgrades necessary to support economic development and housing growth. Although the General Assembly authorized general fund support for the program in 2021, funding has remained modest, with only about \$3 million awarded to municipalities in recent years and no recapitalization included in the FY 2026 budget. As Rhode Island intensifies its focus on increasing housing supply, communities face growing infrastructure demands—particularly in water and sewer capacity, stormwater management, roadway improvements, and utility extensions. These limitations often represent the primary barrier to new housing construction.

To address these challenges, the League recommends dedicating \$30 million over two years to recapitalize the Municipal Infrastructure Grant Program. This investment will allow municipalities to undertake essential infrastructure and utility upgrades in targeted growth centers, unlock development potential, support housing production, and reduce financial pressure on local taxpayers. A strengthened program will also enhance community resilience, improve permitting predictability, and help align local infrastructure capacity with statewide housing and economic development goals.

---

## UNFUNDED MANDATE RELIEF

Unfunded mandates place significant financial and administrative burdens on cities and towns by requiring new programs or services without providing the necessary state funding. The League advocates for strong collaboration and accountability between state and local partners to ensure that any new policy initiative is accompanied by the resources needed for successful, sustainable local implementation.

### To Reduce the Impact of Unfunded Mandates

#### Require Fiscal Impact Statements

Mandate that all proposed legislation and regulatory changes include a municipal fiscal impact statement estimating potential costs to cities and towns.

#### Promote Early Consultation

Ensure that state agencies and legislative sponsors consult with the League and municipal representatives during policy development to assess financial and administrative implications before proposals advance.

#### Strengthen the Unfunded Mandate Review Process

Expand the authority and capacity of the Office of Management and Budget and the Auditor General to review, track, and report on potential unfunded mandates and their impacts.

#### Establish a Legislative Oversight Mechanism

Require the House and Senate Finance Committees to hold hearings on any legislation that would impose new costs or administrative burdens on municipalities.

#### Encourage State–Local Partnership Funding

Support shared-cost models or targeted grant programs that help offset municipal expenses resulting from new mandates, particularly in areas such as education, public safety, and infrastructure.

#### Protect Local Fiscal Flexibility

Oppose legislation that restricts municipal authority to manage budgets, personnel, or revenue streams unless accompanied by adequate state financial support.

#### Promote Transparency and Accountability

Maintain a publicly accessible list of unfunded mandates, including their estimated local costs and any state reimbursements or support provided.



# LOCAL BUDGET DISCIPLINE AND STRATEGIC STATE INVESTMENT

Rhode Island continues to rank among the highest states in the nation for property tax burden, tenth overall, placing added importance on responsible local fiscal management. Municipal officials remain committed to maximizing the value of local tax dollars, mindful of the financial pressures facing residents. Through disciplined budget practices and innovative strategies, cities and towns work to maintain essential public services while limiting tax increases. Sustained state support for aligned priorities, like housing, education and economic development, as well as state-mandated programs, is a critical component of these efforts and prevents additional burdens on taxpayers.

**Sound Fiscal Management and State Support** – Municipalities have exhibited consistent fiscal discipline, supported by increased state investment in education. Since FY 2017, annual property tax growth has averaged 2.45%, significantly below the 4.0% limit established by the statutory tax cap.

This prudent management has been achievable largely due to reliable state aid, which enables local governments to navigate rising costs and maintain service levels without undue dependence on property taxes. A continued strong state–municipal partnership is essential to maintaining this stability and ensuring long-term fiscal sustainability.

FY 2026	3.69%	FY 2021	1.49%
FY 2025	2.01%	FY 2020	2.95%
FY 2024	3.30%	FY 2019	2.10%
FY 2023	2.68%	FY 2018	1.99%
FY 2022	2.10%	FY 2017	2.18%

**Reinstating of General Revenue Sharing Program** – Established in FY 1994, the General Revenue Sharing Program allocated a portion of total state tax revenue, derived from local residents and businesses, as direct aid to cities and towns, distributed based on per-capita income and local tax burdens. Over time, the General Assembly gradually increased the percentage of state revenues dedicated to this program. However, following a Governor’s recommendation, the program was converted to a “subject to appropriation” line item and has not received funding since FY 2009.

**Maintain Funding for Distressed Communities** – The Distressed Communities program provides critical support to municipalities with high property tax burdens relative to resident income. This funding is essential for communities such as Central Falls, Coventry, North Providence, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick, and Woonsocket, where economic challenges limit the ability to generate sufficient local revenue.

Maintaining state funding for this program helps relieve fiscal pressures on these municipalities, allowing them to continue delivering essential services and meeting community needs. This support also plays a vital role in reducing disparities between wealthier and less-resourced communities, particularly those facing higher poverty rates or longstanding economic challenges.

---

## Fully Fund the Payment In-Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) Program and Update the Statutory Target

– The Payment In-Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program is essential for communities that host tax-exempt institutions such as state facilities, nonprofit hospitals, and colleges. These municipalities provide critical services—police, fire, emergency response, infrastructure, and more—to support these institutions, yet they do not receive corresponding property tax revenue to cover the costs. PILOT funding helps bridge this gap by compensating local governments for lost tax revenue.

In recent fiscal years, the state has met the statutory funding target of 27.0%. The League recommends revisiting this target and increasing it to 30.0% for FY 2027 to better reflect actual service costs, which have been on the rise. Additionally, the League supports expanding the PILOT program to include other tax-exempt entities that place significant demands on local services, ensuring more equitable compensation for the municipalities that support them.



**Oppose Agency “Scoops”** – The League strongly opposes the practice of “agency scoops,” in which funds from quasi-governmental organizations are redirected to close the state’s budget deficit. Many of these organizations, including the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation, Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank, and Rhode Island Health and Education Building Corporation, are funded through municipal fees.

These funds are collected for specific municipal purposes such as waste management, infrastructure improvements, environmental compliance, and public facility financing. Redirecting these resources to resolve state fiscal challenges effectively uses municipal dollars to subsidize the state budget, placing additional strain on local governments already working to manage essential services and community needs.

The League maintains that agency scoops are inequitable and should be prohibited to protect scarce taxpayer dollars and ensure that funds dedicated to local services remain where they are needed most.



---

# Executive Board of Directors

## 2024 / 2026

### - PRESIDENT -

**Roberto L. DaSilva**  
Mayor, East Providence

### - VICE PRESIDENTS -

**Andrew E. Nota, 1<sup>st</sup> VP**  
Town Manager, East Greenwich

**Brett P. Smiley**  
Mayor, Providence

**Kenneth J. Hopkins**  
Mayor, Cranston

**Xay Khamsyvoravong**  
Council Member, Newport

### - EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS -

**Christopher A. Beauchamp**  
Mayor, Woonsocket

**Steven Contente**  
Town Administrator, Bristol

**Philip G. Gould**  
Town Administrator, Lincoln

**Donald R. Grebien**  
Mayor, Pawtucket

**Charles A. Lombardi**  
Mayor, North Providence

**James M. Manni**  
Town Manager, South Kingstown

**Timothy J. McCormick**  
Council Member, Scituate

**Edward A. Mello**  
Town Administrator, Jamestown

**A. Ralph Mollis**  
Town Manager, North Kingstown

**Daniel O. Parrillo, Jr.**  
Town Manager, Coventry

**Frank J. Picozzi**  
Mayor, Warwick

**L. Maria Rivera**  
Mayor, Central Falls

**Robert W. Seltzer**  
Town Manager, Smithfield

**James R. Tierney**  
Town Manager, Narragansett

**Michael C. Wood**  
Town Manager, Burrillville

**Randy R. Rossi**  
Executive Director, Ex-officio

### - PAST PRESIDENTS -

**Charles A. Lombardi**  
Mayor, North Providence

**Donald R. Grebien**  
Mayor, Pawtucket

**A. Ralph Mollis**  
Town Manager, North Kingstown

The Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns is a private, nonpartisan, nonprofit association founded in 1968 to represent and advance the interests of Rhode Island's 39 municipalities. The League advocates before the General Assembly, state and federal agencies, and partners across the public and private sectors to strengthen local government and enhance the quality of life in every community. Our mission is to support effective, responsive, and fiscally sound local governance across the state.

**PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY** Advocating for public policies that strengthen municipalities, promote local authority, and improve the effectiveness of city and town government.

**MEMBERSHIP PROGRAMS** Developing, exploring, and implementing services, technical assistance, and collaborative programs that support municipal operations and improve local services.

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS** Promoting stable, cooperative, and productive relationships among local, state, and federal partners to address shared challenges and advance statewide priorities.

**PUBLIC AWARENESS** Building public understanding of the value and importance of strong municipal government through outreach to residents, media, and statewide stakeholders.

**MEMBERSHIP EDUCATION** Providing publications, resources, training, and networking opportunities for elected and appointed municipal officials to support professional development and informed decision-making.

**UNITY** Fostering a strong sense of unity among all 39 cities and towns, enabling a common agenda and coordinated advocacy on issues critical to local government.

**FEDERAL REPRESENTATION** Representing municipal interests at the national level through active participation with the National League of Cities in Washington, D.C., ensuring Rhode Island communities have a strong voice in federal policy decisions.



**RHODE ISLAND LEAGUE**  
OF CITIES AND TOWNS

# RHODE ISLAND MUNICIPAL ARMS

RHODE ISLAND  
AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

Drawings by

Harold Bowditch



Printed by ROGER WILLIAMS PRESS, E.A. Johnson Co.



One State Street, Suite 502, Providence, RI 02908  
401-272-3434 | [rileague.org](http://rileague.org)