Valarie J. Lawson
President of the Senate

Thank you, Hanna and Andrew, for your very kind words.

And thank you to each of my colleagues for again placing your trust in me.

Serving as President of this Chamber, which is comprised of the most dedicated public servants I know, is the greatest honor of my life. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to continue this work alongside all of you. I will never take that trust for granted.

My door is always open to you, and I look forward to resuming our work together to address the serious challenges facing our state.

Congratulations to Majority Leader Frank Ciccone.

Frank, you have been a steady partner as we work together with our colleagues to improve our state. You have helped our Chamber to lead the way to enact policies that protect the marginalized, support working families, and invest in Rhode Island's future.

I look forward to continuing to work in collaboration with you, with our leadership team, with the committee chairs, and with each and every member of this Chamber.

I am especially pleased to welcome two new members to our Caucus. Welcome, Senator-elect Nelly Burdette and Senator-elect Samantha Wilcox. I look forward to working with you.

Each member of this Chamber brings such tremendous and varied knowledge to the table, and we will rely on all of you to meet the challenges ahead.

We have an opportunity in our state to work together with a new Governor and Speaker to address the many challenges facing Rhode Island.

It is an exciting time for Rhode Island and the nation.

Working together, we will continue to enact policies that improve access to affordable healthcare and strengthen our healthcare system.

Some of the areas we will explore in 2027 include addressing private equity in healthcare.

At Fatima and Roger Williams Hospitals – and across the border at Steward Hospitals in Massachusetts – we have seen the chaos private equity can cause in healthcare.

We will explore ways to address the impact of individuals losing Medicaid due to federal policy changes.

We will work to stabilize hospitals.

And we will continue to fight for health priorities this chamber has led the way on, such as:

- Streamlining prior authorization for post-acute care,
- Improving medical malpractice,
- Addressing the primary care crisis,
- Strengthening 988 and MRSS, and
- Continued funding to establish a URI medical school.

Working together, we will confront and address the impacts that changes in federal policies due to HR1 are having on Rhode Islanders.

Working together, we will undertake a thorough examination of the education funding formula. President Gallo has provided exceptional leadership in the implementation and improvement of the existing funding formula.

Now, with the recommendations of a Blue Ribbon Task Force convened by the Rhode Island Foundation, we have appointed a joint commission to see where additional improvements can be made.

Working together, the Senate will continue to fight for expansion to universal pre-k. We have made considerable progress. But there are few things that impact affordability more for a young family than the cost of childcare and pre-k. Given the proven, lifelong benefits of pre-k, we need to continue our work to ensure every child has this option.

Similarly, an injury, a new child, or a sick parent can wreak havoc upon a family's finances.

Rhode Island was once a national leader on paid family leave.

Working together, let us continue to strengthen our TDI and TCI programs.

To touch on just one other policy area, I think that our oversight hearings last session demonstrated the need for in-house engineering expertise within the Department of Transportation. I look forward to working with the new administration to ensure that RIDOT is not entirely dependent on outside contractors to ensure the safety of our roads and bridges.

I am excited to work with each of you on these and many other issues in the coming session.

As Senate leaders, we could not ask for a better team as we confront the challenges ahead.

Thank you all.