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Re: Bill S2518 / H7842 – An Act Relating to Businesses and Professions: State of Rhode Island Interior Design Practice Act

Dear Honorable Members of the Senate Commerce Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for Bill S2518 / H7842: An Act Relating to Businesses and Professions – State of Rhode Island Interior Design Practice Act.

My name is Steve Durkee, and I am a RI licensed architect with 40 years of experience. I was the founder of the architectural firm that is now DBVW Architects and is currently one of the largest firms in Rhode Island. I am proud to have worked with and mentored so many younger architects and interior designers, including Kelly Taylor, Rebecca McGeorge and Libby Slader, who went on to start their own design firms and are now a vital part of and leaders in the RI design industry.

Like architecture, interior design is a distinct profession focused on the planning and design of interior environments that protect the health, safety, and welfare of occupants while supporting and enhancing the human experience. To me, it is logical and necessary to ensure that interior design practitioners meet the qualifications required to make critical design decisions and recommendations that impact the public. I am committed to supporting professional standards that strengthen the design and construction industry in our state.

As a three term appointed member of the RI Building and Standards Commission, maintaining and advancing professional standards has always been a priority in RI. Expanding that to include the work being done by Interior Designers is not only prudent, it's essential.

I view this legislation as a necessary step to ensure that interior design practitioners meet the qualifications required to make critical design decisions and recommendations that impact the public.

This bill will provide interior design professionals who fulfill education, examination, and experience requirements with:

- Greater professional autonomy and equity
- The ability to stamp and seal non-structural interior construction documents
- Alignment with our industry colleagues including architects, engineers, and construction professionals

Importantly, this legislation does not only not restrict the practice of current design professionals, it will dramatically increase the flow of much needed new projects into the construction pipeline.

Interior designers working in commercial, healthcare, educational, and public environments are responsible for critical aspects of the built environment that directly affect occupant safety and well-being. These responsibilities include:

- Space planning and functional design
- Accessibility compliance
- Life-safety considerations
- Adherence to building and fire codes
- Material selections affecting indoor air quality and infection control
- Design decisions that influence occupant health and overall environmental quality

Currently, 29 states, as well as Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico, have enacted legislation recognizing or regulating the profession of interior design. Within New England, Connecticut and Maine have established interior design legislation.

Passing this bill would help align Rhode Island with these jurisdictions to ensure:

- Consistent professional standards
- Stronger consumer protections
- Improved workforce mobility across state lines

This legislation affirms that qualified interior designers who meet established education, experience, and examination standards will take responsibility for code-compliant and safe interior environments. It will also provide clarity for building officials and allied professionals while supporting economic development within the design and construction industries.

As an architect and a resident in the State of Rhode Island, I respectfully ask that you support Bill S2518 / H7842 in recognition of the important role interior designers play in protecting the public and advancing the profession.

Thank you for your service to our state. I welcome the opportunity to answer any questions or discuss this legislation further.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Durkee', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

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