



To: Chair Robert Britto and Members, Senate Committee on Commerce  
From: Jessica David, President of Local Return  
Date: March 24, 2026  
Subject: Testimony in support of Senate Bills 2642 and 2644

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. **I write today to express our strong support of S2642 and S2644.**

Local Return is a nonprofit organization dedicated to building community wealth in historically disinvested neighborhoods in Rhode Island through community ownership and investment. We work to keep assets local, end economic leakages, and stop financial extraction. We also founded the state's first community investment fund at the Rhode Island Community Investment Cooperative.

S2642 would allow for local enforcement of Robinson-Patman Act violations.

The Robinson- Patman Act is a critical antitrust law that prohibits price discrimination by suppliers. When the federal government stopped enforcing the Act in the 1980s, Rhode Island—like other states—began to see the rapid decline of independent grocers and domination of a few large retailers. This was followed by higher prices and food deserts in vulnerable communities. It is important to remember that, before this, independent grocers thrived in the United States, accounting for more than 50% of grocery sales between the 1930s and 1980s. In 2022, the four largest grocery stores alone claim more than 55% of grocery sales. Our neighborhoods and people are ill served by this lack of diversity and access.

**Allowing Rhode Island's attorney general and private businesses the right to sue for damages caused by price discrimination sends the message that Rhode Island will not tolerate corporate abuse.**

S2644 would ban the use of new restrictive covenants which prevent properties from being used as grocery stores.

Big box retailers using restrictive covenants to stop communities' access to fresh food thwarts the kind of economic and community development that Rhode Island needs. Many large, national

food retailers add restrictive covenants to properties they sell. This practice results in higher grocery prices for consumers. Why should Rhode Island allow corporate entities, particularly those not based in Rhode Island, to restrict the use of land and property that they no longer own for decades? This gives them long-term, unfettered power over Rhode Islanders' economic and social well-being.

**Restrictive covenants are an enormous barrier to entry; they make it even harder for smaller, local, and independently-owned grocers to break into Rhode Island markets, thereby limiting competition and raising prices. They harm communities who need access to fresh, affordable food, leaving entire neighborhoods without a local grocery store. These restrictive covenants also hurt our neighborhoods by saddling them with large vacant or underutilized properties.**

Thank you for your attention to these critical issues. We are very grateful that the General Assembly is considering important ways to level the playing field for local retailers and Rhode Island consumers.