



*Distinctive Communities
Powerful Alliance*

March 24, 2026

The Honorable Senator Robert Britto, Chair
Senate Commerce Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: SENATE BILL 2644 – AN ACT RELATING TO PROPERTY -- ESTATES IN REAL PROPERTY

Chair Britto and Honorable Committee Members,

On behalf of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 2644, which would prohibit the use of restrictive covenants that prevent grocery store competition.

Competition is a critical driver of consumer choice, affordability, and innovation. In an era of persistently high food prices and supply chain disruptions, Rhode Island residents, particularly those in underserved or lower-income communities, cannot afford artificial barriers that limit access to affordable groceries. Yet, under current law, national supermarket chains are permitted to impose restrictive covenants on properties they sell, prohibiting the operation of any future grocery stores at those sites for up to 30 years. This is an anti-competitive and anti-consumer practice.

From the municipal perspective, these covenants undermine the economic vitality of our cities and towns. They leave behind underutilized or vacant commercial properties, often in prominent locations that could otherwise serve community needs. These parcels frequently become eyesores and contribute to commercial blight, reducing nearby property values and municipal tax revenues. Local planners and economic development directors are left with fewer tools to revitalize commercial corridors and meet resident needs when such covenants tie their hands for decades.

Moreover, restrictive covenants run counter to the broader goals of food access, public health, and sustainability that many of our communities are striving to achieve. They can limit opportunities to address food deserts and stifle the entry of local, independent, or regional grocers who would otherwise bring fresh competition and investment into our neighborhoods.

By passing Senate Bill 2644, Rhode Island can align its laws with fair market principles, prevent abusive real estate practices, and give municipalities the flexibility they need to encourage responsible redevelopment and ensure that residents have equitable access to essential services.

Thank you for considering our perspective in promoting healthy, competitive, and economically vibrant communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Rossi".

Randy R. Rossi
Executive Director

Cc: Senate Commerce Committee