



State of Rhode Island
Lieutenant Governor Sabina Matos

March 24, 2026

Senator Robert Britto
Chair, Senate Commerce Committee
82 Smith St, Room 212
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Letter of Support for S2644: An Act Relating To Property -- Estates In Real Property

Dear Senator Murray:

I write to you in strong support of S2644: An Act Relating To Property -- Estates In Real Property. This bill would prohibit restrictive covenants relate to grocery stores.

A restrictive covenant is a provision placed in a deed to a property upon sale from one owner to the next. Currently in Rhode Island, major grocery chains will use these restrictive covenants when relocating to ensure no new competition can spring up in the locations they leave behind. While excellent to the bottom line of these multi-billion-dollar corporations, these restrictive covenants present major issues to Rhode Islanders looking to access food in their communities.

For example, shoppers in Woonsocket used to be able to get their groceries at both a Walmart and a Stop-and-Shop. But when these stores pulled out of town in 2004 and 2011 respectively, they placed restrictive covenants on the properties they vacated forbidding groceries from being sold there, covenants which can last for a maximum of 30 years. Woonsocket now currently only has one supermarket in its boundaries, making it one of the largest food deserts in the state. This problem is especially pernicious in a state like Rhode Island, where there are precious-few grocery-store-sized parcels of land to develop on, making a concentrated grocery market all the less competitive.

S2644 will address this issue by making such restrictive covenants unenforceable moving forward. As major corporations continue to use every tool in their toolbox to squeeze consumers in our state, so too must we be bold and innovative in protection of our constituents. For these reasons, I urge you to vote this bill favorably out of committee.

Sincerely,

Sabina Matos
Rhode Island Lieutenant Governor
CC: Senator Melissa Murray