

April 1, 2026

The Honorable Louis P. DiPalma  
Chair, Senate Finance Committee  
Rhode Island Senate  
Rhode Island State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

Re: H7127 — Section 45-2-35.1 (City of Newport Landing and Boarding Fees)

Dear Chair DiPalma:

On behalf of Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) and our member cruise lines, I write to share our views on the proposed increase to cruise passenger landing fees in the City of Newport as outlined in Article 5 (Taxes and Fees), Section 8 of the State's fiscal year 2027 appropriations act (H7127). CLIA member cruise lines represent the majority of cruise calls in the City of Newport and contribute significantly to Rhode Island's tourism sector, generating \$131 million in annual economic impact and supporting more than 500 jobs statewide. As outlined below, our concerns center on whether the proposed fee would be used for services provided to vessels, as well as the operational and financial impacts of immediate implementation without adequate time for cruise lines to plan for additional costs. We appreciate your attention to this important matter.

CLIA is the leading global cruise industry trade association, advocating for safe and sustainable cruise operations, supporting tourism strategies that benefit communities, and promoting innovation toward sustainable cruise operations and the pursuit of net-zero emissions by 2050. With a global presence and membership that includes ocean, river, and specialty cruise lines, maritime leaders, ports, destinations, shipyards, and travel professionals, CLIA provides resources, expertise, and policy leadership to protect and promote the industry's responsible growth.

The proposed amendment to Section 45-2-35.1 of the General Laws, in Chapter 45-2 entitled "City of Newport Landing and Boarding Fees," would increase the existing per-passenger landing fee for cruise vessels in the City of Newport from \$10 to \$15, with \$10 retained by the City of Newport and \$5 allocated to the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA). Because the fee applies to both embarkation and disembarkation, the roundtrip charge per passenger visit would rise from \$20 to \$30 under the proposed language, effective immediately.

While we understand the state's intention to identify new funding sources for RIPTA, we respectfully underscore legal considerations related to the structure of the proposed \$5 passenger fee. Under well-established constitutional principles, port charges are generally required to function as bona fide user fees, meaning they must be directly tied to, and reasonably approximate, the cost of services provided to the vessel. The U.S. Supreme Court has made clear that fees used to generate general revenue or to fund unrelated public programs do not meet this standard. Because the proposed \$5 fee would be directed to support RIPTA operations rather than services provided to the vessel, the proposal may raise questions under these principles.

In addition, this sudden increase in passenger fees would create operational challenges for CLIA member cruise lines. Companies set passenger fares and sell tickets many months to years in advance, leaving little opportunity to offset the new \$5 per passenger fee (\$10 round trip). Changes to port fees are most effective when implemented with sufficient lead time. For example, the prior increase from \$3 to \$10, enacted in 2024, included a 20-month implementation period and is only now taking effect for the 2026 cruise season. Over time, higher and less predictable operating costs may influence cruise lines' deployment decisions and could affect cruise visitation levels and the broader tourism economy in the Newport community.

CLIA and our member cruise lines remain committed to working collaboratively with state and local stakeholders to support the City of Newport's tourism economy, while ensuring that port fee structures remain predictable, transparent, and aligned with established frameworks. This includes evaluating implementation timing and opportunities for further stakeholder consultation.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact me at [bbeall@cruising.org](mailto:bbeall@cruising.org) or (771) 248-6009 if you have any questions or need further information.

Sincerely,



Brian Beall  
Vice President of Government Affairs  
Cruise Lines International Association