



GREATER NEWPORT *Chamber of Commerce*

April 2, 2026

The Honorable Louis DiPalma
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI

Re: Opposition to H7127, Article 5, Section 8 – Newport Landing and Boarding Fees

Chairman DiPalma and Members of the Committee:

I'm writing on behalf of the Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce to express strong opposition to the Governor's proposed increase in cruise ship landing fees included in Article 5, Section 8 of H7127.

The Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce is one of the state's largest business advocacy organizations, whose mission is to connect, innovate, enhance, and advocate for the businesses of Greater Newport. As a trusted and reliable institution for over 100 years, the Greater Newport Chamber is a vibrant collective body of the greater Newport business community with nearly 1000 members representing over 50,000 employees. The Chamber works to create valuable strategic partnerships, promote strong economic growth, diversity, and prosperity to serve its members and the Greater Newport region.

The proposal to impose yet another cruise ship passenger fee may sound modest on paper, but in practice it is a shortsighted policy that risks undermining one of the state's most visible and economically productive tourism assets: Newport's waterfront.

The Governor's plan would add a new \$5 per-passenger fee on cruise ship visitors, on top of the \$10 per-passenger fee enacted last year to support infrastructure improvements along the waterfront and at Newport's Perotti Park. Combined, that is a \$15 charge on every cruise visitor before they even step foot in the city. While the goal of raising \$1 million for the Rhode Island Public Transportation Authority is understandable, using Newport's cruise industry as the funding mechanism raises serious concerns about fairness and unintended consequences.

Cruise lines are highly cost-sensitive. Ports across the East Coast and Canada compete aggressively for itineraries, and even small per-passenger increases can influence decisions when multiplied across thousands of guests and dozens of sailings. Cruise operators have alternatives, and policies that steadily increase costs risk making Newport less competitive

over time. Fewer port calls would translate directly into fewer visitors patronizing local shops, restaurants, tour operators, and cultural attractions that depend on extended seasonal tourism.

Equally concerning is the mismatch between where the costs are incurred and where the revenue would be directed. Newport already shoulders the primary responsibility for managing cruise ship activity, including harbor operations, marine safety, police and emergency services, traffic management, sanitation, and infrastructure maintenance. These are ongoing municipal responsibilities that intensify on cruise days and require careful coordination and investment.

Last year's \$10 per-passenger fee, dedicated specifically to improvements at the cruise disembarkment area, reflected a reasonable connection between impact and reinvestment. The newly proposed fee does not maintain that alignment. Instead, it would redirect funds away from the host community to support a statewide transportation system that cruise passengers may not use, while the City continues to absorb the operational and public safety demands associated with cruise visitation.

If Rhode Island seeks to strengthen public transportation, it should pursue funding strategies that are broad-based and equitable, rather than relying on a single municipality and a narrowly defined group of visitors. Funding statewide priorities should not come at the expense of the local communities that are already managing significant tourism impacts.

Newport has demonstrated a commitment to thoughtful, responsible tourism management. That effort depends on policies that recognize both economic realities and municipal capacity. Additional fees that risk discouraging cruise activity while offering no direct benefit to the host city run counter to that goal.

A more balanced approach—one that supports statewide needs without weakening local economic engines—would better serve Rhode Island in the long term.

Sincerely,



Erin Donovan-Boyle
President & CEO
Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce