

May 21, 2026

Re: Senate Bill 2023

Dear Committee Members

I am writing to express my support for Senate Bill 2023, but with further amendments. I commend Senate Minority Leader de la Cruz for her efforts to create of an Inspector General. In the wake of the Washington Bridge fiasco, polling has shown that Rhode Islanders overwhelming want an Inspector General. However, there are two changes to the legislation which are needed to ensure that an Inspector General is truly independent, non-partisan, and effective.

At the outset, it should be noted that the proposed legislation correctly does not exempt the General Assembly and the Rhode Island Judiciary from oversight by the Inspector General. The Inspector General's job is to prevent and detect "fraud, waste, abuse and mismanagement." This legislation recognizes that no part of state government is entirely immune from waste, fraud and abuse. The principle of separation of powers does not prevent the General Assembly from enacting a law which makes itself subject to oversight by the Inspector General. Just as the Attorney General, an executive office, can engage in criminal investigations of the General Assembly and Rhode Island Judiciary without violating separation of powers, an Inspector General can investigate General Assembly and Rhode Island Judiciary to prevent and detect "fraud, waste, abuse and mismanagement" without violating separation of powers.

With that stated, the proposed legislation indicates that the Inspector General is appointed by five partisan elected statewide officials and four partisan elected legislative leaders. Although this group is bi-partisan, this means the Inspector General would be selected by a group of politicians. When a group is made of politicians, politics will likely influence the decisions of that group. The Inspector General must be "independent" and act as independent watch dog. The Ethics Commission is supposed to be a watch dog. The Judicial Nominating Commission is supposed to be independent. However, the members of the Ethics Commission and Judicial Nominating Commission are selected by politicians. At times, these commissions appear to be influenced by politics and do not act independently. In order to make the Inspector General less susceptible to politics, the Executive Committee of the Association of Inspectors General should screen applications and provide a list of three names from which the governor can pick an Inspector General. This is the best way to ensure that Inspector General is truly an independent watch dog.

Next, the proposed legislation does not place sufficient restrictions on who is eligible to be an Inspector General. The proposed legislation states a person would be ineligible to be Inspector General if he or she was a candidate for or held elective office within the prior year. However, it does not state that a person is ineligible if he or she was a public office holder, had an executive branch cabinet level position or held a political party office within the prior year. This would further ensure that the Inspector General is nonpartisan. Perhaps, eligibility to be an Inspector General should be restricted to individuals who have not been a resident of the state for the past year. Rhode Island is a small, densely populated state that is rather parochial and insular. An Inspector General, who was an out-of-state resident, would likely have a real outsider's perspective

on state government, and would be free of many of the inherent conflicts that arise from living and working in such a small state over the course of one's life.

These recommendations would mean some major changes to the bill. Because of the Washington Bridge fiasco, Rhode Islanders are hungry for some boldness. Seize the moment to make a meaningful and major reform to state government.

Steven Frias

107 Garden Hills Dr.
Cranston, RI 02920