

April 13th, 2026

Senate Finance Committee  
Rhode Island General Assembly  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Written Testimony in Support of Senate Resolution S2676

Dear Chairman DiPalma and Members of the Rhode Island Senate Finance Committee:

As Executive Director at HousingWorks RI at Roger Williams University, committed to advancing housing affordability and informing state and local decision makers on its importance to the vitality and sustainability of our state economy, I write in support of continued state funding for Main Street Rhode Island, managed by Grow Smart RI in alignment with Main Street America. I urge the Committee to approve the \$150,000 appropriation in H8316 for FY 2027. This is a high-return economic development investment, and the time to act is now.

Rhode Island's walkable, historic commercial districts are among the state's most underutilized economic assets. Main Street Rhode Island exists to change that, through a coordinated statewide network backed by Main Street America's 46-year track record. What makes this program work is who it brings together. The network currently spans across 28 of our 39 municipalities, connecting local government, neighborhood associations, community development leaders, and small business owners at the same table, to brainstorm and build strategies no individual community can generate on its own. Through free monthly roundtables, network convenings, technical assistance trainings, and the inaugural Main Street Together Conference, Main Street Rhode Island serves as the catalyst for strengthening our Main Street districts as places where small businesses can succeed and community connections can grow. We need to capitalize on this momentum.

State investment in this program is not a subsidy or grant, it is leverage. The Main Street America model carries a documented average return on investment of 24 to 1, generating much needed local revenue. Intentional efforts produced through participation in this program attract private spending, business reinvestment, and property development that would not otherwise occur. A well-resourced state coordinating program creates the conditions for that investment: trained local leadership, documented strategies, and a credible, connected network of communities ready to act. Every dollar of state funding directed toward this infrastructure is a multiplier for local economic activity.

HousingWorks RI at Roger Williams University conducts research and data analysis to inform public policy and promote dialogue about the relationship between housing and the state's economic future. Our economy cannot thrive without ensuring that residents can afford to live in the state. We know that providing affordable, high-quality housing near job opportunities requires a comprehensive effort that includes economic development planning to strengthen communities and provide economic opportunity. Main Street Rhode Island is key in directing and organizing this kind of work, helping communities plan for development and ensure their future vitality. Just as our local economies depend on a strong workforce that can live nearby, achieving our housing goals requires good, stable jobs for Rhode Islanders. The Main Street program is an important bridge between stakeholders in planning,

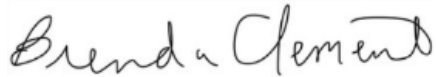
development, housing, historic preservation, and other fields that together shape our built environment and our future.

As we near the end of Year 1 of the three-year pilot established by the 2025 legislation, the state's early investment is beginning to compound. Communities participating in the inaugural "learning cohort" are moving from learning to action, developing projects with real economic potential through Main Street America's Four Point Approach. That technical assistance pipeline exists only because Rhode Island currently has an active state-level membership in Main Street America. Without continued funding, that partnership cannot be sustained, the momentum communities have built would stall, and the returns the state has already begun to seed would be left unrealized.

I respectfully urge the Senate Finance Committee to approve the \$150,000 appropriation for Main Street Rhode Island in FY 2027.

Thank you for your consideration. I invite you to contact me should you have any questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,



Brenda Clement  
Executive Director, HousingWorks RI at RWU