



**National Main Street
Center**
a subsidiary of the
National Trust *for* Historic Preservation



April 29, 2026

Chairman Louis P. DiPalma
Finance Committee
Rhode Island Senate
82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02903

Chairman Marvin L. Abney Senate
House Finance Committee
Rhode Island House of Representatives
82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02903

RE: Support for H8316 and S2676 – Funding for the Main Street Rhode Island Program

Chairman Abney and Chairman DiPalma,

On behalf of Main Street America, we are writing to express our strong support for H8316 and S2676, which will provide essential funding to the Main Street Rhode Island Program (MSRI). By funding Main Street Rhode Island, **the Legislature will invest in systemic revitalization strategies that generate tax revenue while improving quality of life** for Rhode Island communities. Main Street America and its 47 Coordinating Programs have cultivated successful commercial districts nationwide for over 45 years.

In its emerging stage, MSRI has recruited twice the number of participating communities than a typical first year effort, **demonstrating that Rhode Islanders are ready and willing to do the hard work of revitalizing their own communities**. Participant surveys consistently show that early actionable tactics taught by MSRI are already empowering local leaders to build economic vitality through place-based strategies. With over 45 years of experience in preservation-based economic development, we have seen firsthand that the success of local efforts depends on a strong statewide Coordinating Program.

Other states invest just thirty cents per resident annually to support a strong Main Street Coordinating Program. In Rhode Island, a comparable investment would be approximately \$333,000 in public funding to support a strong statewide Main Street Coordinating Program, which in turn would help dozens of communities strengthen local revenue-generating districts. The \$150,000 budget request put forward by Main Street Rhode Island is a modest capacity-building investment in the statewide infrastructure needed to help more Rhode Island communities strengthen their downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts. Connecticut, Vermont, Maine, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania all invest substantially more in their Main Street Coordinating Programs. **Without the continued statewide investment proposed in H8316 and S2676, Rhode Island risks leaving its communities at a competitive disadvantage** when it comes to downtown revitalization, small business support, housing development, and leveraging



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modest public investment to generate private funding. The legislature's investment will provide advanced technical training that can help activate further public and private investment. **For every \$1 in public funding to implement the Main Street Approach, there is a \$24 return through private investment.**

The housing solutions resulting from Main Street programs are especially crucial in Rhode Island. Main Street America's national research found that 75% of Main Street programs report that there is not enough housing to accommodate those who want to live in their districts, thereby limiting local revenue. At the same time, many of these districts have vacant or underused upper floors that could help meet local housing needs. The challenge is that these housing projects are often difficult to move forward without local capacity, technical support, and coordination around zoning, financing, building codes, historic rehabilitation, and small-scale development. **A strong Main Street Coordinating Program trains communities to turn vacant downtown space into productive housing, increasing both tax revenue and the customer base for small business revenue.**

Main Street America stands ready to support the Main Street Rhode Island Coordinating Program and local communities in achieving their revitalization goals. Main Street America is a national nonprofit supporting thousands of statewide and local Main Street programs.

We appreciate your consideration of this continued investment in Rhode Islanders who are rolling up their sleeves to implement the Main Street Approach in their own downtown. **A statewide Main Street Coordinating Program is the strongest mechanism to deliver the necessary technical training directly to Rhode Island residents.** We look forward to engaging with you further in your shared effort to support the Main Street Rhode Island Coordinating Program.

Sincerely,

Erin Barnes
President and CEO
Main Street America

Kathy LaPlante
Vice President of Coordinating Programs
Main Street America