



May 21, 2026

The Honorable Louis P. DiPalma | Chairman  
Senate Committee on Finance  
82 Smith Street – Room 211  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

**Written Testimony In Opposition of S2680 (An Act Relating to Public Utilities and Carriers – Rhode Island Public Transit Authority)**

Dear Chairman DiPalma and Committee Members:

I am writing to express my opposition to the funding constraints proposed in S2680 for the new and much needed 21<sup>st</sup> century transit center in Providence. As a downtown resident and an avid supporter of public transit, I firmly believe that enhancing our public transportation system is crucial for sustainable urban living, economic growth, and environmental health – and few decisions carry greater long-term consequence than how Rhode Island chooses to invest in its public transit infrastructure.

S2680 would prohibit RIPTA from using voter-approved bond proceeds to advance the proposed transit center project. I firmly believe this action is misguided, and its passage would compound decades of underinvestment in a system that Rhode Islanders depend on every day.

**Rhode Island has underfunded public transit for too long.** According to the Federal Transit Administration, Rhode Island invested just \$19 per capita in transit in 2021 – compared to \$68 in Connecticut, \$101 in Delaware, and \$239 in Massachusetts. This is not a new problem; it is a decades-long pattern that has left RIPTA chronically under-resourced relative to peer states. And yet, despite that persistent gap, RIPTA is already one of the most cost-efficient, well-run mid-sized transit agencies in the nation – outperforming comparable systems in Hartford and Worcester by significant margins per service hour. RIPTA has no more margin for austerity. The answer cannot be more cuts, more delays, or more deferred investment.

**Kennedy Plaza is not working.** Those of us who work and invest in Downtown Providence know this from daily experience. The existing hub presents persistent operational challenges, public safety concerns, and a streetscape that undermines the economic vitality it should be supporting. A modern, well-designed transit facility near Providence Amtrak Station is not merely desirable – it is essential to the long-term competitiveness of our downtown and to the riders who rely on RIPTA every single day.

**The transit center is a critical investment in our transit infrastructure.** Cornish Associates has spent decades building a mixed-use residential neighborhood in downtown Providence – helping revitalize and preserve our historic fabric and helping build community. We know that transit infrastructure is not a line item; it is a foundation. A modern transit hub creates the conditions for continued private investment, housing development, and job creation. It also provides something equally important: equitable access. For residents across Rhode Island – regardless of income – public transit is often the primary means of reaching employment, education, and healthcare. Every year we delay a serious investment in this system is another year we fall further behind and leave those residents without adequate service.

**The bill's fiscal concerns are not a reason to block the project.** S2680 raises questions about procurement structure and cost controls. These are legitimate subjects for oversight, and we encourage the General Assembly to exercise rigorous scrutiny of the contracting process. But the appropriate response is stronger accountability – not depriving the project of voter-approved funding and walking away from a generational opportunity. Prohibiting the use of these bond proceeds does not fix RIPTA's finances. It simply ensures the status quo at Kennedy Plaza endures.

**Voters already weighed in.** The bond funding at issue was approved by Rhode Island voters. Overriding that democratic mandate before the project has had the opportunity to demonstrate its value is a troubling precedent.

We urge the Committee to oppose S2680. But we also urge something larger: a genuine, sustained commitment to fully funding RIPTA as a state budget priority. Rhode Island cannot achieve its goals for economic growth, housing, climate, or equity without an unwavering commitment to public transportation. The transit center is one piece of that larger vision – and it deserves the General Assembly's support, not its obstruction. Thank you for your consideration and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'ARNOLD B CHACE JR.' in all caps, written in a cursive style.

Arnold B Chace Jr.  
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