



Mayor of Providence

Brett P. Smiley

May 21, 2026

The Honorable Louis P. DiPalma, Chair
Senate Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chair DiPalma and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I oppose Senate Bill 2814, which would redirect statewide hotel tax revenue from the Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau (GoProvidence) to the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation. This change would significantly diminish GoProvidence's ability to support year-round visitation and business travel, work that is essential to the economic health of our city and to Rhode Island as a whole.

GoProvidence's hotel tax allocation is not a subsidy. It is a strategic investment that delivers measurable returns for Providence and for the state. Tourism is one of our most effective economic drivers, and weakening the organization responsible for attracting visitors would have direct consequences for local businesses and the residents whose livelihoods depend on a strong hospitality sector.

Providence relies on GoProvidence not only to promote the city to leisure travelers, but also to position us as a premier destination for meetings, conventions, and sporting events. These visitors fill our hotels, restaurants, and cultural institutions, the very assets that make Providence stand out. The organization's work directly supports our downtown economy, our neighborhoods, and the small businesses that anchor them.

GoProvidence's scope of work is fundamentally different from other regional tourism districts. While other regions focus primarily on leisure travel, GoProvidence and its subsidiary, the Rhode Island Sports Commission, are responsible for attracting meetings, conventions, trade shows, and sporting events statewide. When an event is in town, the impact is unmistakable: restaurants are booked, hotels are full, and our streets are active. In FY25 alone, GoProvidence booked 221 future events, representing 285,564 attendees, 128,784 hotel room nights, and nearly \$93.8 million in direct spending across Rhode Island, not just in Providence.

Beyond its core responsibilities, GoProvidence also plays a critical statewide role in major initiatives that extend far beyond the Providence Warwick region. For example, GoProvidence has worked extensively with my office to prepare Rhode Island for the 2026 World Cup, having already invested approximately \$300,000 in statewide planning and marketing efforts, including \$40,000 to support youth tournaments across the state.

When we look at competitor regions, the disparity in resources becomes even more clear. Visit Pittsburgh, one of our destination's biggest competitors, has a \$16 million budget and a staff of 51. GoProvidence operates with a \$7.6 million budget and a staff of 31 yet is expected to compete on the same national

stage and support both citywide and statewide economic activity. Rhode Island cannot afford to weaken the organization responsible for bringing visitors here.

The impact of this work is not defined solely by statistics. It is essential to the health of our local businesses, the jobs it sustains, and the livelihoods that depend on it. Providence prides itself on being a great city to live in, to work in, and to visit, and GoProvidence is a key partner in achieving those goals. Reducing its funding would have immediate, negative consequences for our business community and for the economic stability of our city.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee vote no on Senate Bill 2814.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brett P. Smiley" with a vertical line extending downwards from the end of the signature.

Brett P. Smiley
Mayor