

PROVIDENCE WARWICK CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

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

Dear Chairman DiPalma and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau (PWCVB), I would like to assert our opposition to Senate Bill 2814. Our organization serves as the primary agency for meetings, conventions, and sporting events in Rhode Island. Our scope of work is different than the other tourism agencies, including Rhode Island state tourism. Their primary focus is leisure tourism. While we are proud to market the City of Providence to leisure visitors, the bulk of our time and resources are spent placing large group business statewide.

We have been very successful in that effort. In Fiscal Year 2025, we booked 221 meetings, conventions, and sporting events for future years. These events are expected to yield \$98.3 million in direct spending and an estimated total economic impact of \$166 million for Rhode Island.

The reason the PWCVB receives statewide funding is because we sell and market the state-owned Rhode Island Convention Center. In calendar year 2025, more than 1.3 million people visited the Center. Nearly 65 percent of those visitors were from out of state and every state in the union was represented. Many of those people don't just stay in Providence, they explore all of Rhode Island.

The work done through our subsidiary, the Rhode Island Sports Commission, is particularly impactful statewide. The PWCVB and the RI Sports Commission are playing a significant role in preparations for the 2026 FIFA World Cup. This is an enormous effort and we have incurred about \$300,000 in expenses thus far, including providing \$40,000 in support funds to municipalities hosting local tournaments. None of those tournaments are in Providence or Warwick.

Beyond the direct spend impact of our work, our organization links our efforts to economic development and the need to both lure and retain businesses in Rhode Island. We work with Commerce RI to help them access the companies that come in for conventions. We collaborate with downtown organizations to create events and programs that bring vitality to downtown Providence, making it more attractive to employers, like our recent, sold-out, food and wine festival. And we support small businesses statewide through our Buy Local RI program.

PROVIDENCE WARWICK CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

Our efforts on behalf of our home state led to our organization being voted the Best CVB in the Northeast for 2023 and 2025 by our clients and peers. For comparison, our biggest competitor, Visit Pittsburgh, had a 2025 budget of \$16 million and a staff of 51. Our neighbors in Boston had a 2025 budget of more than \$49.5 million and 64 employees. We had a 2025 budget of \$7.6 million and 30 employees.

We achieve more with less but competition grows fiercer every day. We find ourselves up against bigger cities who have much bigger budgets for all kinds of business, from the large events booked at the Rhode Island Convention Center to the smallest groups placed in hotels throughout Rhode Island. Cutting our funding at such a crucial time not only affects the PWCVB, but it also affects the businesses that rely on our efforts to bolster their bottom line and the thousands of hospitality industry workers that need their paychecks.

Sincerely,



Kristen L. Adamo
President & CEO