

April 2, 2026

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

RE: SENATE BILL 3132- AN ACT RELATING TO HIGHWAYS -- RELOCATION OF UTILITY SERVICES

Chair DiPalma and Honorable Committee Members,

On behalf of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns and our 39 member municipalities, we write to express our strong support for this legislation amending Chapter 24-8.1 relating to the relocation of utility services, and we thank Senator Robert Britto for sponsoring this important measure.

This bill represents a meaningful and practical step toward addressing a long-standing municipal concern regarding the financial burden associated with utility relocations necessitated by state highway projects. By providing full reimbursement for the relocation of municipally owned utility facilities, the legislation appropriately recognizes the unique role that cities and towns play in owning and maintaining critical public infrastructure, including water, sewer, and in some cases electric systems.

Under current practice, municipalities may be required to absorb a share of these relocation costs despite having no control over the underlying project that necessitates the work. This creates an unfunded or partially funded mandate, placing pressure on already constrained local budgets and, ultimately, on local taxpayers. This legislation directly addresses that imbalance and ensures that municipalities are not financially disadvantaged by state-initiated infrastructure improvements.

The League strongly supports this approach, as it will:

- Provide significant fiscal relief to cities and towns by eliminating unexpected and often substantial capital expenditures;
- Improve local budget stability and planning, allowing municipalities to better prioritize and manage their own infrastructure investments;
- Reduce reliance on local revenue sources, including the property tax, to fund projects that are driven by state-level decisions; and
- Promote more efficient and timely completion of transportation projects through clearer expectations and reduced cost-sharing disputes.

In addition to these clear benefits, the League believes this policy change will foster stronger coordination and collaboration between state agencies and municipal departments. Utility relocations often require close coordination with local public works, water, and sewer authorities, and in some cases fire departments where

hydrant placement and water flow considerations are involved. Ensuring that municipalities are fully reimbursed will help facilitate this coordination and support timely compliance with project schedules.

This legislation reflects a thoughtful and balanced approach that aligns financial responsibility with project authority, while recognizing the essential role of municipal infrastructure in supporting the state's transportation network. It is a positive step toward strengthening the partnership between the state and its cities and towns.

For these reasons, the League respectfully urges passage of this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued partnership with Rhode Island's municipalities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "R.R. Rossi".

Randy R. Rossi
Executive Director

Cc: Honorable Members of Senate Finance Committee