



April 7, 2026

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
Rhode Island State House
slegislation@rilegislature.gov

Re: **Testimony regarding SB 2686**, to establish an independent Office of Elder Advocate

Dear Chair Murray and Honorable Committee Members,

ABC-RI advocates for the rights and interests of all Rhode Islanders residing in long-term care facilities. We strongly support SB 2686 because RI elders are a vulnerable population, with a complex array of challenges, served by different agencies, who require a dedicated advocate.

While the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program is an effective advocate for residents in long-term care facilities, there are significant gaps in advocacy and oversight for elders living in their own homes and in areas outside the LTC Ombudsman's authority.

Likewise, the Office of Healthy Aging is a valuable partner and resource for older Rhode Islanders, but importantly, it falls under the jurisdiction of the executive branch and is not an independent agency. When elder advocacy lives inside the executive branch, it faces a built-in conflict. The same administration regulating and overseeing Long Term Services and Supports, medical transportation, Medicaid administration, case management, and more, is also the one fielding complaints when those programs fail people.

Tens of thousands of Rhode Island elders have no family or trusted person to help them navigate the system and push back when the system fails them. Some of the many challenges these folks have to face on their own:

Benefits and access

- Denied or delayed Medicaid services
- Trouble navigating The POINT
- Benefits they're entitled to but can't access
- Pharmacy assistance denials

Safety and exploitation

- Financial exploitation
- Myriad scams targeting elders
- Situations where Adult Protective Services may not be responding adequately

Legal and housing

- Landlord neglect, unsafe housing conditions, or eviction
- Lease disputes in senior housing
- Guardianship and conservatorship concerns—including unwanted guardianship

Medical and caregiving

- Inappropriate discharge from hospital back to home without adequate supports in place
- Caregiver burnout with no respite available

The establishment of an Elder Advocate would provide consistent and comprehensive support for our elders, who often have limited ability to advocate for themselves, and we support the passage of S2686 to establish this office.

Thank you for your time and attention, and for all of your work on behalf of Rhode Islanders.

Sincerely,
Kathleen Gerard, ABC-RI