

April 6, 2026

In support of S2686

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
Senator Melissa Murray, Chair

Dear Chair Murray and Committee members,

I am pleased to write to ask you to support S2686 by Senator McKenney. S2686 creates an Office of Elder Advocate responsible for promoting the rights of older Rhode Islanders and advocating on their behalf. Older Rhode Islanders, the fastest growing age group in the state, now comprise one out of every five persons in the state and are projected to be one out of four persons by 2030. Yet, their voices are often fragmented across agencies and programs which may not always be in alignment and have different or competing priorities. While the Long Term Care Ombudsman program (LTCOP) protects the rights of those receiving long term services, the 90% of older Rhode Islanders living in their own homes or in independent housing in the community lack a dedicated, independent legal advocate to protect their rights.

The Office of Elder Advocate, headed by an attorney with expertise in elder law and civil rights, would be able to provide legal assistance to older adults whose rights may be being abridged due to such issues as guardianship, financial exploitation and denial of public benefits. Low-to-moderate income older adults often do not know where to turn when dealing with these types of issues and cannot afford private legal representation.

An Elder Advocate independent of the executive branch agencies that manage some of the very programs an older adult may challenge can provide holistic advocacy addressing cross-sector issues affecting all older adults, ensuring their needs are prioritized in state policy.

The Office of Elder Advocate would not duplicate services provided by the Office of Healthy Aging (OHA) and its protective services unit that investigates reports of abuse and neglect of older persons. OHA does not have a staff attorney who can represent individual older adults in court or in administrative hearings. And the OHA Volunteer Guardianship is generally limited to persons in institutional settings and dealing with healthcare decisions.

I urge you to support this bill to ensure the property, civil and human rights of all older Rhode Islanders are protected and they have a strong and independent voice advocating on their behalf.

Thank you,  
Christine Gadbois  
Barrington, RI