

March 26, 2026

The Honorable Jacob Bissaillon, Chair
Senate Housing and Municipal Government
Rhode Island Senate
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: SENATE BILL 2704 – AN ACT RELATING TO PUBLIC PROPERTY AND WORKS -- ACQUISITION OF LAND

Dear Chair Bissaillon and Honorable Committee Members,

On behalf of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 2704, which would establish a system for cities, towns, and state agencies to designate certain roads, paths, and trails as “special ways” subject to protections against paving, widening, and clearing. The bill also ensures that prior to a highway being formally abandoned, a city or town council must vote on whether to preserve a public easement.

The League supports this legislation and appreciates its important intent to protect Rhode Island’s historic, scenic, recreational, and conservation corridors. The bill provides municipalities with the flexibility to tailor protections to local needs, allowing cities and towns to adopt ordinances or regulations, define boundaries, and manage access in a way that aligns with their planning priorities and community resources.

We also support the suggestion from the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) to clarify that a municipality or state agency may only designate a special way on property in which it holds title or a legal interest. This adjustment would ensure that the designation process respects property rights and avoids circumstances where special ways are designated on land against the will of the property owner, whether municipal or state.

By providing tools to designate special ways and preserve easements before road abandonment, this bill helps safeguard Rhode Island’s historic, cultural, and recreational assets. It also encourages public access for walking, bicycling, horseback riding, and other non-motorized activities, supporting quality of life and community engagement.

For these reasons, the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns supports Senate Bill 2704 and encourages its passage.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective and for your consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R.R. Rossi', written in a cursive style.

Randy R. Rossi
Executive Director

Cc: Honorable Members of Senate Housing and Municipal Government