



Testimony of Matthew Netto, AARP Rhode Island
In Support of Senate Bill 2904
Senate Housing and Municipal Government Committee
April 9, 2026

Chairman Bissaillon and members of the Senate Housing and Municipal Government Committee:

AARP is a nonpartisan, social mission organization with 38 million members nationwide and nearly 125,000 members here in Rhode Island. We advocate on behalf of issues that impact older adults, and we appreciate the opportunity to offer our support for Chairwoman Gu's Senate Bill 2904.

Senate Bill 2904 would advance the interests of older Rhode Islanders by adding a representative of an aging adult organization to the State Planning Council and a permanent committee on aging to the state planning council. According to Rhode Island's Office of Healthy Aging, over 24 percent of Rhode Islanders are 60 years old or older versus 22 percent nationally. Rhode Island's older adult population is growing rapidly. Estimates show that by 2030, 1 out of every 4 Rhode Islanders will be 65 years of age or older.

The State Planning Council is a state-level planning body that guides how the state looks at long-range development and coordinates planning across government and communities. It's the core policy body for broad planning — land use, transportation, economic strategy, and more — as part of the Statewide Planning Program. Since Rhode Island's population is aging rapidly, it makes sense that a demographic that makes up about a quarter of our state's population should be well represented in our state's planning decisions.

Senate Bill 2904 would also significantly improve the Long-Term Care Coordinating Council's ability to develop and coordinate state policy concerning all forms of long-term health care for seniors and adults with chronic disabilities and illnesses.

The Long-Term Care Coordinating Council is a public body tasked with providing state policymakers with information and recommendations on how our state can best serve our constituents who require significant care for chronic conditions. As structured, the Council requires an in-person meeting of 33 stakeholders from across the state, of which 17 members are needed to form a quorum. Because this is a meeting of a wide variety of stakeholders, including state officials, nonprofit leaders, working healthcare professionals, and consumers of the health services the council oversees, scheduling meetings around a quorum is a challenge.

In turn, the progress of the Council is sometimes hampered when it is unable to approve minutes or take votes. S 2904 would bring the quorum requirement of the Council in line with other policy councils managed by the Lieutenant Governor, such the Emergency Management Advisory Council, and allow it to work more effectively.



Lastly, S 2904 eliminates less-favored terms related to older persons and persons with disabilities from Rhode Island laws and would direct the law revision director to draft a bill for introduction in the 2027 legislative session to revise affected general laws. Specifically, the bill is aiming to replace the word “elder” or “elderly person” with the term “older adults” and “handicapped” or “disabled” with the term “person with disabilities”.

Person-first language (PFL) is a way of speaking and writing that emphasizes the individual before their trait, disability, or condition. PFL frames the disability or trait (i.e. age) as one characteristic of a person. PFL helps us remember that people are unique individuals and that their abilities are only part of who they are. The term “elderly” often carries negative stereotypes of frailty or weakness while “older adult” focuses on the individual as an “adult,” affirming agency, personhood, and the achievement of longevity.¹

Dispensing with less-favorable terms related to older persons and persons with disabilities is a matter of respect. Our state’s laws should set the precedent for what is right and what is wrong. It is wrong to address individuals in a way that neglects their status as a person – and it is insidious, creating and perpetuating an ageist and ableist public mindset.

AARP Rhode Island supports S 2904 because it works to make Rhode Island a more equitable and respectful place for older adults. We ask that you recommend passage. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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¹ <https://www.vitalityseniorliving.com/resources-for-seniors/senior-vs-older-adult-terminology-of-senior-living/>