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Rhode Island Works Best When We Say **UNION YES.**

March 11, 2026

Chair Walter S. Felag Jr.
Senate Special Legislation and Veterans' Affairs Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Testimony in Support of SB2753

Dear Chairman Felag and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Rhode Island AFL-CIO, representing more than 80,000 union members across the state, I write in support of Senate Bill 2753, introduced by Senator Ujifusa. This bill would address the critical staffing shortage at the RI Veterans' Home by requiring the Department of Administration to:

1. Conduct a wage benefit analysis for all classifications wage rates and progressions.
2. Establish a corrective action plan.
3. Revise job specifications.

For far too long the dedicated members of Local 904, AFSCME who work in the Veterans' Home have been chronically understaffed, operating with twenty (20) fewer Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) than currently budgeted. Despite aggressive recruitment efforts, the facility simply cannot recruit and retain staff because the pay progression is inadequate and significantly less competitive than what CNAs can earn at other nursing homes and hospitals across Rhode Island and in neighboring states like Massachusetts. As a result, qualified workers often choose higher-paying opportunities elsewhere, leaving remaining staff stretched thin and making it increasingly difficult to maintain safe staffing levels for the veterans in their care.

Chronic staffing shortages at the Veterans' Home place significant strain on the dedicated workers who care for our veterans every day. When CNA positions remain unfilled due to inadequate pay scales and progression, the burden falls on existing staff which are already operating on a skeleton crew. This forces workers to work short-handed, increasing burnout, and making it harder to provide the level of care our veterans deserve.

In healthcare, short staffing puts both workers and patients at risk of injuries and preventable mistakes. For these reasons I respectfully urge the Committee to support SB2753. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Erica A. Hammond', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Erica A. Hammond
Legislative Director, Rhode Island AFL-CIO