



Public Testimony
Senate Finance Committee
Senate Bill 2685 (Protecting RIPTA Senior/Disabled No-Fare Pass)
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Submitted by The Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty

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The Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty is a coalition of diverse religious communities and advocacy partners throughout the state who have come together to fight poverty.

Today, we are writing to voice our organization's strong support of Senate Bill 2685.

Senate Bill 2685 would strike language written into law last spring which allows RIPTA to change its fare structure and eliminate the senior/disabled no-fare bus pass. RIPTA plans to charge low-income seniors and people with disabilities \$0.50 per ride (and \$0.25 per transfer) starting this summer in lieu of the senior/disabled no-fare bus pass. We believe that the elimination of the senior/disabled no-fare program would create a substantive barrier to transportation for many Rhode Islanders who are already both impoverished and at high risk for social isolation. Swift action on this legislation, along with a necessary financial allocation to RIPTA (estimated at \$1.5-\$2 million), would protect this vital program and prevent these changes from being implemented this summer.

Last week, during the RIPTA budget hearing, we testified before this committee to oppose cuts to RIPTA's senior/disabled no-fare program. To reiterate the key message: people with disabilities and senior citizens living in poverty rely on the senior/disabled no-fare program for basic transportation needs. Many of these Rhode Islanders have very low-incomes or no incomes at all. The senior/disabled no-fare pass allows access to transportation for the essentials of daily life, such as buying groceries, accessing community centers, visiting family or friends, getting to overnight shelters, participating in recovery meetings, and attending religious services if they so choose.

We encourage you to pass Senate Bill 2685 to address this issue and protect transportation access for low-income seniors and people with disabilities.

Thank you for your time and public service.