

May 9, 2024

The Hon. Sabina Matos
Lieutenant Governor
State House, Room 116
Providence, RI 02903

VIA MAIL AND EMAIL

RE: 24-H 7565 and 24-S 2759

Dear Lieutenant Governor Matos:

As organizations dedicated to promoting transparency in government, we are writing to express our concerns about the above bills that are sponsored by your office and relate to meetings of the Long Term Care Coordinating Council which you chair. These concerns have previously been expressed at committee hearings by both the ACLU of Rhode Island and Common Cause Rhode Island, and were the subject of an email to you from Steven Brown of the ACLU on April 22nd.

As you know, the bill does two things to address a problem the Council has run into in obtaining a quorum for its meetings. First, it would reduce the number of members needed for a quorum. Second, it would allow members of the Council to attend meetings remotely. While we have no objections to the first change, we have serious concerns about the second and its impact on government transparency. Since the bill has already passed the House, we urge you to eliminate this problematic section on the Senate side if the bill is given favorable consideration there.

Since our objections to the "remote meetings" section of the bill are in line with the ACLU's written testimony which has been previously shared with you, we will not reiterate them other than to emphasize that (1) to the extent that advisory bodies are given the ability to meet remotely, it is crucial that certain basic guardrails missing from this legislation be in place to ensure appropriate public access to the meetings, and (2) those guardrails should be addressed comprehensively rather than one public body at a time.

We are especially reluctant to see this provision pass in light of the precedent it would set for other public bodies to seek similar accommodations, and considering the representation made to Mr. Brown by a Council member that simply reducing the Council's quorum requirement would go a long way to fixing the problem. We therefore strongly urge you to eliminate the "remote meeting" portion of the bill if and when it is considered in the Senate.

We would appreciate hearing back from you about this at your earliest opportunity. If you have any questions about our position on the bill, feel free to get in touch with any one of us. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Linda Lotridge Levin, **RI Press Association** and **ACCESS/RI** – lindalevin@uri.edu
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