



Testimony of Matthew Netto, AARP Rhode Island
In support of House Bill 7677
House Finance Committee
April 10, 2024

Chairman Abney and Members of the Finance Committee:

AARP is a nonpartisan, social mission organization with 38 million members nationwide and nearly 128,000 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 Requires that all inspections, cleaning and maintenance and repairs of sidewalks along state highway and municipal roads, except for snow and ice removal, be the responsibility of the state, as House Bill 7677 By Representative Shallcross Smith intends to do.

Sidewalks play a vital role in community life. As conduits for pedestrian movement and access, they enhance connectivity and promote walking. As public spaces, sidewalks are the front steps to a community, activating streets both socially and economically. Safe, accessible, well-maintained sidewalks are a fundamental community investment that enhances public health and maximizes social capital.¹

Eight in ten Americans prefer being in a community that offers sidewalks and good places to walk. Six in ten prefer a neighborhood that features a mix of houses, shops and services within an easy walk versus a neighborhood that requires a car for every errand.² Sidewalks increase foot traffic in retail centers, delivering the customers that local shops and restaurants need in order to thrive. Quality sidewalks are an integral part of creating a livable community for people of all ages and abilities.

It is time that the state of Rhode Island reconsiders who maintains our sidewalks and how they are to be upkeep. A WPRI report showed that as of October of 2023 there is a backlog of 7,500 sidewalk repair requests in the city of Providence alone.³ House Bill 7677 would require that all inspections, maintenance, and repairs of sidewalks along state highway and municipal roads be the responsibility of the state. We support this change with the hope that it leads to safer communities for all Rhode Islanders.

We urge you to recommend passage. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Netto".

Matt Netto, AARP RI, Associate State Director - Advocacy
401-834-0524 / mnetto@aarp.org

¹ National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO). (October 2012) Urban Street Design Guide pp 24-25. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/2012-nacto-urban-street-design-guide.pdf>

² National Association of Realtors. (November 2013) National Community Preference Survey. <http://www.realtor.org/articles/nar-2013-community-preference-survey>

³ <https://www.wpri.com/target-12/over-7500-requests-for-providence-sidewalk-repairs-tracked-in-city-database/>