



March 25, 2025

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
Chair, House Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House, 82 Smith Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: Amend HB 5076 – Department of Health FY2025 Supplemental and FY2026 Budgets

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of One Neighborhood Builders, a Rhode Island community development organization based in Providence and the convening organization for the Central Providence Opportunities Health Equity Zone, I request amending the Department of Health's (RIDOH) budget included in Governor McKee's budget proposal, House Bill 5076, to include \$2.1 million to continue funding the 14 Health Equity Zones (HEZs).

For ten years, RIDOH has provided critical funding to the HEZ network, which serves Rhode Island's most vulnerable residents through a unique, community-driven approach to improve overall community health and resilience. The proposed budget lacks support for this initiative, which is critical to the state's public health infrastructure. Without action, HEZs would not be funded to continue their critical work in 2026.

This nationally recognized model has demonstrated its positive impact over the last ten years, including:

- Reducing public healthcare costs: The average per person public insurance costs are significantly lower in Health Equity Zone communities than those not in a HealthEquity Zone.
- Reducing rates of chronic disease: Many Equity Zones show lower chronic disease rates than expected given their social vulnerability, with high cholesterol and heart disease declining faster than the state average.
- Strengthening community resilience and recovery: From 2018 to 2022, social vulnerability in Equity Zone communities dropped by 21%. Lower vulnerability reduces harm from disasters, economic downturns, and health crises, enabling faster recovery and response.

In addition, the state's investment in CPO-HEZ facilitated over \$8 million in federal and private investment in Central Providence alone, catalyzed local business growth through the distribution of over \$500,000 in loans to small businesses, and increased civic engagement and neighborhood infrastructure.

I encourage the committee to include HEZ funding in the RIDOH budget to advance health and well-being for all Rhode Islanders.

I am happy to talk further about these issues; please feel free to reach out to me at chapman@onenb.org. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter H. Chapman" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Peter H. Chapman
President & CEO, One Neighborhood Builders