



March 27, 2025

The Honorable Susan R. Donovan
Chair, House Health and Human Services Committee
Rhode Island State House, 82 Smith Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: Support HB 5849 – An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government – Office of Health and Human Services

Dear Chair Donovan 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 (CPO-HEZ), I write in strong support of House Bill 5849, introduced by Representative Teresa Tanzi. This bill would codify Rhode Island Equity Zones (RIEZ), formerly known as Health Equity Zones, as a formal initiative of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS).

The RIEZ initiative is a network of 14 community-based collaboratives across Rhode Island working to address local health disparities. Each RIEZ brings together residents, community-based organizations, healthcare providers, businesses, and government agencies. By working directly with communities, RIEZs provide services, resources, and support that impact the “upstream” factors contributing to poor health outcomes.

Local environmental and social conditions shape our access to economic opportunity, high quality education, medical care, and safe environments. Inequitable investment in various neighborhoods contributes to persistent health and economic disparities that have disproportionately adverse impacts on communities of color and those who earn the lowest incomes.

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 RIEZ communities than those not in a RIEZ.
- Reducing rates of chronic disease: Many RIEZs 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 RIEZ communities dropped by 21%. Lower vulnerability reduces harm from disasters, economic downturns, and health crises, enabling faster recovery and response.
- Serving as a national model for health equity: RIEZs have secured significant federal and private investment, reducing the burden on the State budget and encouraging other states and localities to invest in proven, place-based, collaborative approaches to advance health equity.
- Leveraging private funds to meet community needs: The RIEZ network has facilitated the investment of more than \$8 million in federal and private investment. These funds catalyzed local business growth through the distribution of over \$500,000 in loans to small businesses and increased civic engagement and neighborhood infrastructure.

Codifying the RIEZ initiative is a critical step to ensuring equitable investment in communities across RI. I encourage the Committee to pass HB 5849 and commit to advancing health equity and economic mobility 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, appearing to read "Peter H. Chapman, Esq.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Peter H. Chapman
President & CEO, One Neighborhood Builders