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Sent: Tuesday, March 12, 2024 8:07 AM
To: House Judiciary Committee
Cc: victoria4ri@gmail.gov; Rep. Morales, David; Sen. Bell, Samuel W.; Rep. Cortvriend, Terri-Denise
Subject: House Bill 7645

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Hi - I am writing to offer written testimony for House Bill 7645, the qualified abandonment of town roads.

I am a longtime hiker and explorer of the RI woods, and as many know, almost all of our woods were once pastures/fields/farms. The stone walls, cellar holes, little cemeteries and other remnants of this past add a beautiful and culturally rich layer that is somewhat unique to our RI forest experience. As a descendant of these farmers, these are the places that I feel the most connected to my RI ancestors.

Since these were once inhabited places, our woods are often criss-crossed with old roads that are often wrongly referred to as 'abandoned' by their towns. This is an industrial/auto-centric use of the word since myself and others are obviously still using these road, and our purposes are just as valid as someone driving on a paved road to go to the mall. Currently, towns only have the option of paving/maintaining these old roads or 'abandoning' them to the adjoining property owners (or just ignoring the issue entirely) and they almost always chose the latter to avoid costs. While I certainly agree that there is no need to 'improve' many of these old ways, abandoning them to the adjoining owners introduces access issues and as I mentioned earlier, one should not have to give up the right to traverse through a woodland just because he or she is not driving through it. Sometimes abutting owners think that absorbing and ending access to these old roads will solve problems of illicit use (such as atving), but in my experience, that never happens. Illicit users will continue to do so, and now people such as hikers, birders, etc who would tend to help with problems of illicit use stay away. If anything, abandonment typically creates a problem of greater illicit use. There are myriad examples of this throughout the state, but Burrillville and West Glocester particularly abound with examples.

Giving the town an option of designating an old road as a scenic ROW 'foot path' (or whatever term they'd like to use) is a good way to go, pardon the pun. This is a tool successfully utilized by other New England states to address these issues and I hope you will support it.

Andy Grover

Providence