



**State of Rhode Island
Lieutenant Governor Sabina Matos**

March 25, 2025

The Honorable Robert Craven, Sr.
Chair, House Committee on Judiciary
House Lounge, Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Lieutenant Governor Sabina Matos in Support of H 5902 -- Testimony as Prepared

Chairman Craven and members of the House Committee on Judiciary: thank you for the opportunity to speak today in favor of my legislation, H 5902, which would end restrictive covenants on grocery stores. Thank you to Rep. Edith Ajello for introducing this legislation on my behalf and Rep. Corvese for cosponsoring it. This bill is part of my Fair Price Grocery Agenda, which is a series of bills designed to address the rising cost of groceries increase competition and protect consumers from abusive practices by superstores.

As I have said to other committees, there is no silver bullet for grocery prices, but competition is a major factor in keeping prices low. Restrictive covenants are a clearly anti-competitive and anti-consumer practice employed by national supermarket chains to prevent new grocery stores from opening in Rhode Island. Under our current law, these big box stores are able to sell their property with a covenant preventing future owners from opening a grocery store at that location for up to 30 years. These covenants encourage massive companies to spend their money not on cutting costs, training workers, or improving their service, but on buying up real estate where a future competitor may one day open.

Nowhere is this more crystal clear than in Woonsocket, which is one of the most persistent and notable food deserts in Rhode Island. In the city of Woonsocket, there are more properties with a covenant prohibiting the sale of fresh food than there are supermarkets. This food desert is not a force of nature—it is the predictable result of bad corporate citizenship.

Across the country, major municipalities like Chicago and Washington DC have banned these types of covenants. These bans are both effective and legally-sound: in Washington DC, 20 supermarkets opened in the five years after they banned these practices. In Washington State, their Attorney General was able to enforce a municipal ban and require a major grocery chain to release a property it had held hostage for decades. We should lead the nation by becoming making Rhode Island the first to ban these restrictive covenants statewide.

I appreciate your consideration of this bill, and I urge you strongly to recommend its passage to your colleagues in the House of Representatives. My office and I are available to you today and always to answer any questions you have.

Sincerely,

Sabina Matos
Lieutenant Governor

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Judiciary
The Honorable Edith Ajello, Megan Cotter, Teresa Tanzi, Karen Alzate, Arthur Corvese, Brandon Potter, Mary Ann Shallcross Smith, Michelle McGaw, Jennifer Boylan