



State of Rhode Island

Department of State | Office of the Secretary of State

Gregg M. Amore, *Secretary of State*

March 7, 2024

Honorable Evan P. Shanley, Chair
House Committee on State Government and Elections

RE: In support of H7663 – An Act Relating to Health and Safety – Vital Records

Dear Chair Shanley,

I write this letter in support of House Bill 7663, legislation that would require the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) to guarantee that municipalities have access to a local copy of historic vital records, which will ensure that their respective constituents can access vital records from their city or town hall.

As Secretary of State, my team and I prioritize ensuring the information Rhode Islanders need is accessible – whether it is to do business, to vote, or simply to interact with their government.

While our staff at the State Archives work hard to provide records online, cities and towns have been the record keepers for their residents for hundreds of years, long before there was a centralized electronic record system. Cities and towns should be allowed to continue the practice of certifying records for their residents, as provided by RIDOH as the record creator, regardless of their age. Additionally, public access online at the State Archives would be the only access cities and towns have to their residents' records, and with current law, they cannot certify these records, which disrupts expected constituent services.

This legislation will make it clear that either born-digital records or physical records, which are now being created in the State's Vital Records database at RIDOH, must be provided to municipalities for certification purposes before transferring the original record to the State Archives and Public Records Administration.

Over the past several months, our office, the Rhode Island Department of Health, and the Rhode Island City and Town Clerks' Association have met and came to consensus on this proposed legislation. Therefore, we urge this Committee to support this legislation, as it will ensure greater accessibility to all Rhode Islanders.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Michelle Arias, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, at marias@sos.ri.gov.

Sincerely,

Gregg M. Amore
Secretary of State

cc: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on State Government and Elections
The Honorable Terri Cortvriend

State House, Room 218, Providence, RI 02903

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