



State Senate
— District **38** —

December Updates & Housing Forums

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

It's that time of year again! Not just for stocking stuffers and gingerbread cookies. For us it's the mad rush to meet with stakeholders and get our legislative requests submitted to Legislative Counsel before the holiday break. Also, I happen to be speaking at two local housing forums in one week! See below:



Let's Talk about ADU's and Housing

RI State Senator Victoria Gu
RI State Representative
Tina Spears
Matthew Netto (AARP RI)

Sat Dec 9th 1:30-3pm
Cross Mills Library
4417 Old Post Rd,
Charlestown
RSVP & ask questions:
victoria4ri.com/town-hall

Town Hall on Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's) & Housing

Time/Date: Sat Dec 9th, 1:30-3pm

Location: Cross Mills Library (4417 Old Post Rd, Charlestown)

Join us at a town hall meeting to discuss ADU's (Accessory Dwelling Units), their historical use as intergenerational housing, and their potential to help address the housing crisis in Rhode Island. Speakers include Matthew Netto from AARP Rhode Island and Russ Partridge from the WARM Center in Westerly.

RSVP / Submit Questions for Charlestown Town Hall

Let's Talk Housing.

LMI - ADU - Neighborhoods - Development

Affordable Housing Town Hall

AUDITORIUM AT THE
WESTERLY PUBLIC LIBRARY



A 1.5 Hour
Discussion

Open to
the Public

Wednesday
Dec. 13

6:00pm - 7:30pm
Westerly Public Library,
144 Broad St.,
Westerly, RI 02891

Victoria Gu
State Senator

Kevin Lowther II
Town Councilor

Community Stakeholders

For More Information: www.westerlylibrary.org

Town Hall on Affordable Housing

Time/Date: Wed Dec 13th, 6-7:30pm

Location: Westerly Library ([144 Broad St, Westerly](#))

Town Councilor Kevin Lowther, Town Planner Nancy Letendre, and Ad-Hoc Affordable Housing Committee members will discuss their ongoing work to update Westerly's affordable housing strategy. State Senator Victoria Gu will provide an update on state legislation to enable Accessory Dwelling Units.

RSVP and submit questions here: victoria4ri.com/town-hall

RSVP / Submit Questions for Westerly Town Hall

Commissions & Task Forces

Throughout the summer and fall, commissions that were newly established through state legislation began to study a lot of topics in depth: everything ranging from short-term rentals to pensions and plastic waste reduction. After months of hearings, each commission creates a report with policy recommendations, which often turns into a bill or multiple bills.

Because the videos are not necessarily easy to find, I'm posting recordings of several commission meetings below. If you're interested, keep an eye out for opportunities to testify or submit email testimony to the commission chair.

[Plastic Bottle Waste Commission \(Sep 27, 2023\)](#)

[Short-Term Rental Commission \(Oct 11, 2023\)](#)

[Pension Advisory Commission \(Nov 2, 2023\)](#)

Pictured below: Senator Meghan Kallman chairing the Task Force to reduce recidivism of women in the criminal justice population

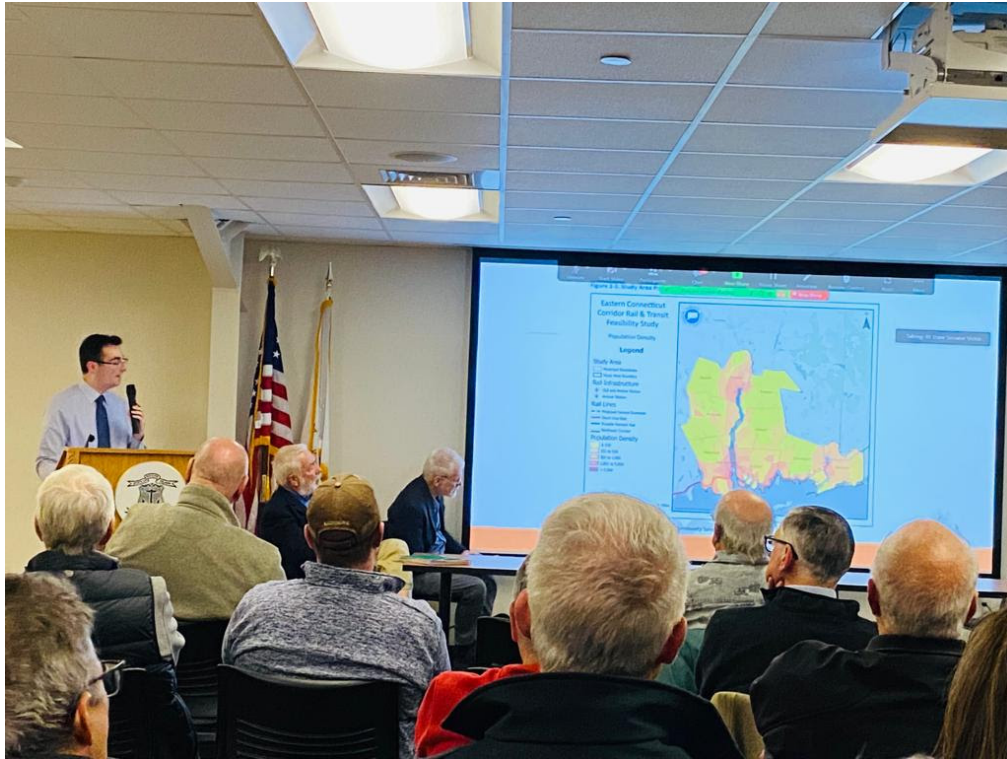


2023 Highlights

Medicaid reimbursement for school psychologists and social workers

Earlier in 2023, we heard compelling stories from educators in Westerly and across the state about the youth mental health crisis in schools. I was glad to co-sponsor a bill ([SB-869](#)) directing that services provided to a Medicaid-enrolled student by school social workers and certified school psychologists will be eligible for Medicaid reimbursement. Some states already do this, and it helps us take advantage of federal funding. Federal changes are also helping to make this reimbursement process easier (read here: <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/new-laws-aim-to-combat-the-youth-mental-health-crisis-heres-what-they-do/2023/08>)

In the News



Commuter Rail Town Hall Recap

Wednesday's town hall highlighted a vision for commuter rail connectivity between southern Connecticut and Rhode Island. Connecting workers via commuter rail to booming job centers in the area will be key to reducing traffic congestion, cutting greenhouse gas emissions, and giving residents affordable transportation options.

Action Alert: Everyone interested in making this happen should contact their Congressmembers and ask them to help get some of the federal infrastructure funding. You can say something like: "Connecticut just completed its feasibility study on extending commuter rail to Westerly. Please push for Westerly Train Station to receive rail infrastructure funding for high-level platforms so that we can have more frequent rail service."

- [Senator Whitehouse](#)
- [Senator Jack Reed](#)
- [Representative Seth Magaziner](#)
- [Representative-elect Gabe Amo](#)

Thank you to the Westerly advocates, [RI Association of Railroad Passengers](#), town council members, Town Manager Shawn Lacey, Michael Scheffer, Stonington Borough Warden Michael Schefers, Zell Steever from Connecticut, Alex Berardo

from Westerly, State Senator Lou Raptakis, State Representative Tina Spears, for participating and pushing to make this a reality.

Thank you also to Sarah Ingle from RIPTA for presenting about the upcoming statewide paratransit pilot program

WesterlySun news coverage: https://www.thewesterlysun.com/news/westerly/study-spotlights-westerly-station-as-possible-commuter-rail-terminus/article_3de23d40-8259-11ee-bfe0-bb2deec77ecc.html

Watch the Recording

Past Meetings / Events



Fundraiser + Holiday Party

It was great to see so many familiar faces and new faces at our fundraiser / end of year holiday party! It takes a village and I'm grateful for the many volunteers in the room who work with me or alongside me on everything from transit to housing, shoreline access, education equity, and much more.



Save RIPTA Rally

Last Thursday I stood with other state legislators at a rally to fully fund RIPTA. With a fiscal cliff looming, essential routes to/from South County like 65x, 95x, summer beach service, Sunday and holiday service, and routes in other parts of the state are at risk of being eliminated.

The coalition is pushing to include enough funding in the Governor's budget to:

- 1) Prevent the fiscal cliff and more devastating service cuts
- 2) Make sure bus drivers get a living wage, and
- 3) Start implementing the Transit Master Plan that will expand transit service statewide

Pictured above: RI Representative Jennifer Stewart and RI State Senator Meghan Kallman



Ribbon-Cutting for Wood River Health's Expansion

Very excited for [Wood River Health](#)'s latest expansion in Hope Valley! Wood River is a "Safety Net" provider of healthcare, which is crucial for underinsured and uninsured people in our area. This expansion allows them to offer more dental services, mental health services, radiology services, physical therapy services, plus a community conference room!



Site Visits with Women's Development Corp

Building affordable housing in South County is a challenge because we have to attract nonprofit developers to our area. We had an introductory meeting between

two members of the Westerly Town Council (a third one couldn't make it) and Women's Development Corporation (WDC). WDC is based in Providence, but they have done affordable housing development in South County before. We included site visits of underutilized property or lots in Westerly, and it was a mix of town-owned, state-owned or privately owned property.



Discussing Priorities with Charlestown Town Council

Thank you to the Charlestown Town Council for discussing legislative priorities with me and State Representative Tina Spears. A couple items that came up were: accurate counting of Low-Moderate Income housing units in the area, the upcoming Amtrak study of the Northeast Corridor, and road maintenance.



Being a Guest Judge @ RISD's ADU Design Competition

Very excited to see the Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) design concepts that came out of Rhode Island School of Design's student competition! The winning design will be announced in January, and the student designs will be displayed at the Rhode Island State House.

Upcoming Events / Places I'll Be

- Fri Dec 8th: Meeting with local planners in our area to discuss housing & land use
- Fri Dec 8th or Sat Dec 9th in Westerly Downtown (check with [Chamber of Commerce](#) to confirm): Starry Lights debut for the holiday season!
- Thur Dec 14th 9:10am on WBLQ Radio (1230 AM): I'll be on Resiliency Hour for the first time to talk about climate resiliency efforts
- Thur Dec 14th 5pm: SKHS Holiday Concert & Finale Event for the SK300 Anniversary Celebration
- Tues Dec 19th: Work day in Providence, including RIBLIA Caucus meeting with the DCYF (Department of Children, Youth & Families) Director
- Wed Dec 20th 9am: My usual monthly conversation with Frank Prosnitz on WBLQ Radio (1230AM)
- Commission Meetings: I'll continue visiting some local town commissions to keep up to date with what they're planning and share any relevant state resources. If you'd like me to join a meeting, please reach out! victoria4ri@gmail.com

Programs You Can Apply For

Looking to reduce your heating costs? Get a detailed no-cost energy assessment of your home through RI Energy. This is the first step toward getting (significantly subsidized) weatherization and insulation work done on your home. This opportunity is available for homes with 1-to-4-units through Rhode Island Energy. To schedule a home energy assessment, call **1-888-633-7947**.

For more information: <https://www.rienergy.com/RI-Home/Energy-Saving-Programs/Home-Energy-Assessments>

To see all the energy incentives for residential homes, businesses, and nonprofits:

<https://energy.ri.gov/incentives>



Step 1

Schedule your choice of an in-person or virtual appointment and provide basic information about your home.



Step 2

An Energy Specialist will visit your home to identify personalized energy-efficiency recommendations.



Step 3

Get no-cost energy-efficiency products.



Step 4

Receive 50% or more off approved insulation and air sealing (up to \$4,000) and additional rebates toward qualifying energy-efficient equipment.*

Friends of Victoria Gu, PO Box 116, Charlestown, RI 02813, United States, 4013880696

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