

**VICTORIA**  
**GU**  
**State Senate**  
— **District 38** —

## **February Updates & Climate Resiliency Forum**

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Our 2024 legislative session has begun, and I think we're off to a good start. We've had time over the last six months to improve some bills from last session. One new bill that I'm sponsoring is on a lot of people's minds after we got hit by several storms in a row: the Act on Coasts.

We have to do more to adapt to sea level rise so that we don't lose the places we love in South County. Before I was State Senator, I was on Charlestown's Climate Resiliency Commission and worked to get Charlestown enrolled in the RI Municipal Resilience Program. It's a great program that enables towns to apply for funds through the RI Infrastructure Bank. But as Topher Hamblett (Save the Bay) says in The Public's Radio news piece about our Act on Coasts bill: "Communities should not be left to fend for themselves." Also, how do we know if we're doing enough? We need to have a comprehensive, and actionable plan for coastal resiliency, and that's what the Act on Coasts calls for. Please reach out to your state representatives and state senators and ask them for help passing [H-7022 \(Act on Coasts\)](#)

[Read more about Act on Coasts](#)



## Let's Talk about Climate Resiliency & Our Coastline

RI State Senator Victoria Gu  
Pam Rubinoff & J.P. Walsh (URI)  
Bryan Oakley (Eastern CT  
University)  
Sue Anderbois (The Nature  
Conservancy)  
Topher Hamblett (Save the Bay)

Mon Feb 12th 6-7pm  
Zoom Town Hall  
RSVP & ask questions:  
[victoria4ri.com/feb12](https://victoria4ri.com/feb12)

# Virtual Town Hall on Climate Resiliency

Time/Date: Mon Feb 12th, 6-7pm

A lot of people are asking questions like: "How bad were these storms?" "These dunes were washed out. What's the beach going to look like this summer, or after the next big storm?" We'll try to answer your questions with a science-based presentation focusing on Rhode Island's southern shoreline by Pam Rubinoff, JP Walsh (URI Coastal Resources Center), and Bryan Oakley (Eastern CT University). We'll leave time for questions, and Sue Anderbois and Topher Hamblett will talk about how you can be involved in shaping climate resiliency efforts in your town or in the state.

RSVP & Get Zoom Link for Virtual Town Hall

## Legislative Fast Facts

As we start a new legislative year, I'll cover some of the high-profile bills we are looking at in the state house. This month: Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's).

1. **ADU's Go by Many Names:** Accessory Dwelling Units are known by various names around the world. They're often called "granny flats," "in-law suites," "backyard cottages," or "secondary suites." They serve as an independent living space with a kitchen and bath. Depending on local laws, an ADU could be created by renovating a garage/attic/basement, adding an addition to the house, or building a separate structure ("backyard cottage"). ADU's are often invisible from view because they're positioned behind or are tucked within a larger home
2. **Historical Roots:** While ADU's have gained popularity in recent years, they're not a new concept. All around the world and in Rhode Island, they've been commonly used in many cultures as additional housing for extended families.



- 3. Aging in Place:** ADU's are often used to accommodate seniors or give them an option to move from their main house into the more accessibly-designed ADU. This allows older adults to maintain independence while having family support or hired nurses / caregivers next door.
- 4. Energy Efficiency & Land Use:** Local laws typically require that ADU's are smaller in size, making them more energy-efficient. Additionally, using ADU's on already-developed lots to fill housing needs can reduce the demand for new construction on forested land. RI DEM regulations for adding bedrooms/ADU's also require upgraded nitrogen-reducing septic systems in salt pond management areas.
- 5. Rental Income Potential:** Many homeowners build ADUs as rental units to generate additional income. This extra income can help offset mortgage costs or provide a source of financial security. Note that RI legislative proposals in 2023 included a ban on using ADU's for short-term rentals of 30 days or less.



Photo courtesy of AARP: The Whitley family extended their home into the backyard and created an ADU with a separate entrance for their daughter, who can now help her elderly parents when needed. ADU's are often invisible from view because they're positioned behind or are tucked within a larger home



## In the News



## RI Leads in Energy-Efficient Buildings

Rhode Island is leading the movement toward modernized, energy-efficient building standards. After we passed my bill, S-0815, in 2023, the National Association of Home Builders and Rhode Island Builders Association put together the first industry-led workshop in the country to train home builders on the 2024 international energy efficiency codes.

By adopting these latest codes, the average new homeowner in Rhode Island will save \$814 annually -- or 18.5% on their utility bills. The 2024 codes will also include electric-readiness for the first time in new construction, which will make it easy for the homeowner to, if they so choose, add the latest technologies like solar panels, heat pumps, or EV charging.

This initiative was made possible by the support of Governor Governor Dan McKee , Speaker Joe Shekarchi, Senate President Dominick Ruggerio and Majority Leader Ryan Pearson

Pictured right: John Marcantonio – CEO RIBA, Governor Dan McKee, myself, and incoming Chairman of NAHB – Carl Harris.

Pictured left: Myself, David Caldwell, and Governor Dan McKee

# Past Meetings / Events



## White House Communities in Action

I was glad to bring Rhode Island issues to the White House during “Communities in Action: Building a Better Rhode Island and Connecticut.” The event is part of a White House series that features local elected officials and community leaders discussing how key investments and programs are improving their state and communities.

For example, Rhode Island schools have also received multi-year federal grants to support mental health programs. I want to extend our state’s gratitude to the Biden-Harris administration for prioritizing and funding grants for programs like Project AWARE, which support mental health awareness, prevention, intervention, and resilience for kids in our local schools.



## **Celebrating Our Firefighters & EMS Providers**

We had a good listening session with our South County firefighters and EMS providers at the annual RI Southern Firefighters League gathering. Our local towns are lucky to have many committed volunteers to provide these essential services, and we're committed to getting you the resources you need. Congrats to Representative Tina Spears for getting the Legislator of the Year Award for, among other things, our successful push to increase Medicaid reimbursement for EMS services.





## **Brainstorming on Statewide Commuter Rail**

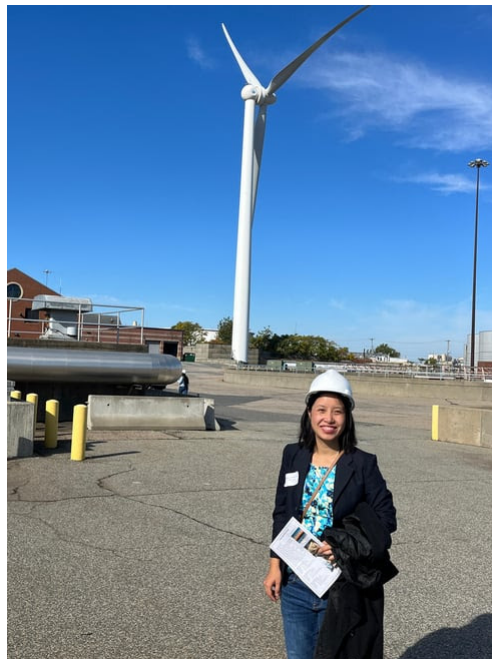
Great brainstorming session with Lt Governor Sabina Matos on how to make statewide commuter rail a reality, starting with Westerly as the next logical extension of CT Shoreline East (the feasibility study was just released by Connecticut Department of Transportation last month).

Westerly Station ridership numbers for Amtrak surpassed 50k boardings in 2023- the highest it's ever been according to RI Association of Railroad Passengers, and that's despite infrequent stops. With a prime location in downtown Westerly, this is all the more reason to upgrade the station for more frequent service.



## **Chariho Schools Omnibus Meeting**

At the annual Chariho omnibus meeting (school committee, town councils, and state representatives), we talked about a number of issues that will be in the state budget, including state aid for regional school districts' transportation needs, reimbursement levels and timelines for school construction/renovation, and much more.



## **First Day of 2024 Session and Committee Status Update for the Act on Climate**

Both the Senate and House were back at the State House on Tuesday, Jan 2nd, to start this year's legislative session, just in time to see the Independent Man statue that was temporarily on display at the State House.

On 23rd, DEM Director Terry Gray gave an update to our Environment & Agriculture Committee on the status of the [Act on Climate](#), which mandates that RI reduce emissions 45% below 1990 levels by 2030 and reach net-zero by 2050. We've made some strides in setting one of the nation's most ambitious 100% renewable



energy goals (100% renewable by 2033), followed by a joint strategy with our neighboring states to procure new offshore wind projects at a competitive price for electricity. **We still have a lot of work to do on other sectors like transportation and residential/commercial buildings, which is one of the areas I focused on in 2023.**



## WBLQ Resiliency Radio Hour

Before the storms rolled in, I had a great discussion with Gina and Katy, who co-host the WBLQ - FM 103.1 Resiliency Hour. We covered:

- The big-picture climate resiliency challenges in our area
- How the federal government subsidizes people to live in risky areas by subsidizing flood insurance
- What's at stake with our vulnerable habitats (salt marsh, barrier beaches) if they cannot migrate in response to sea level rise
- What can be done?

[Listen to WBLQ Resiliency Radio Hour](#)



## **Serving a Holiday Meal at the WARM Center**

Glad to be serving a holiday meal at the WARM Center in Westerly. Thank you to Russ Partridge and the Warm Center staff for everything you do to help people in need, and thank you Anne Pearce and her family for organizing!





## #SK300 Finale Celebration

Thankful to the #SK300 committee for putting on a phenomenal series of events over the past year to celebrate South Kingstown's 300th anniversary. The finale holiday concert was a lot of fun, and I'm also very proud of all the talent that SKHS students displayed.

## Upcoming Events / Places I'll Be

- Mon Feb 5th 7pm at the Charlestown Police Station's Community Room: Public presentation on the damage incurred to the West wall of the Charlestown Breachway and the recent award of a Resiliency Grant
- Tues Feb 6th 9am at the Crowne Plaza in Warwick: Visiting the Culinary Tech competition, where students across the state including Chariho Tech will be demonstrating their culinary skills and presenting hospitality business plans. I'm looking forward to this event, hosted by the RI Hospitality Association, that will get students excited about different career paths.
- Thurs Feb 8th 3pm at the State House: Clean Water Action event to talk about environmental legislation and priorities for 2024
- Sun Feb 25th 1pm: ORCA Beach Cleanup, meet at Westerly Town Beach
- 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](mailto:victoria4ri@gmail.com)





# ENROLL TODAY

## Rhode Island Special Needs Emergency Registry

For more information call  
**(401) 222-5960 / RI Relay 711**  
or visit **health.ri.gov/emregistry**



\*Only for Rhode Island residents

## Programs You Can Enroll In

**Enrolling** in the Rhode Island Special Needs Emergency Registry (RISNER) lets police, fire, and other first responders in your community better prepare for and respond to your needs during a hurricane, storm, or other emergency.

Many people may need extra help during a time of emergency, including people who:

- Use life support systems such as oxygen, respirator, ventilator, dialysis, pacemaker, or who have chronic conditions and require treatment (e.g., have diabetes and require insulin);
- Have mobility needs and use a wheelchair, scooter, walker, cane, or other mobility device;
- Are visually impaired, blind, hard of hearing, or Deaf;
- Have speech, cognitive, developmental or behavioral health disabilities; or
- Use assistive animals or a prosthesis.

The information submitted to RISNER is shared with local and state first responders and emergency management officials. Your information is held confidentially and

only accessed to assist in your safety and well-being. The Rhode Island Department of Health and [Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency](#) have worked with E-911 to notify first responders when they are responding to a household that may have someone enrolled in the Registry. While enrolling in RISNER does not guarantee assistance, this notification allows first responders additional time to consider how to best respond to that incident. Please note that strict confidentiality is maintained at all times and only those who have a reason to access the information are authorized to do so.

If you cannot complete the enrollment form yourself, a family member, caregiver, or authorized representative can complete the enrollment form on your behalf.

[Enroll Yourself or a Loved One](#)

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