



**State Senate**  
— **District 38** —

## **July Newsletter: How a Bill Becomes a Law**

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I'm so encouraged by and thankful for the volunteers who turned out to help gather signatures to get me back on the ballot for November! We met and surpassed our goal early: we needed 100 validated signatures, and we ended up with 180+

In the last couple weeks I've enjoyed knocking on doors and getting to know residents' priorities. I know a lot of national news and everything from the Presidential race to the Supreme Court has unsettled people, to put it lightly. Even though I'm also worried about it, I try to focus on things we can do locally. There's a lot of important work we're doing at the state level to protect healthcare access, civil rights, reproductive rights, and much more, in Rhode Island. Local races like town council and school committees matter a lot, too, and your vote has more impact on these local races.

**Get involved and meet some of our volunteers at our kickoff Mon July 22nd 5:30pm in Westerly (RSVP to [victoria4ri@gmail.com](mailto:victoria4ri@gmail.com); address provided upon RSVP)**

Sign up for our volunteer kickoff



## How a Bill Becomes a Law

### A Step-By-Step Guide

In the last two years, I've gotten plenty of requests from residents who want to change a certain law or regulation. A lot of people didn't know where to start. I decided to write a brief guide: a step-by-step overview of how a bill progresses from an idea to a RI law, including the role advocacy groups/members of the public play in influencing this process. Then I'll give an example to illustrate this: the Blue Envelope bill, which originated with a Westerly High School student.

### Step 1: Bill Drafting

1. **Idea Generation:** A bill starts as an idea. It can come from legislators, state agencies, advocacy groups, or concerned citizens.
2. **Drafting:** The bill's language is drafted into a legal form. This task is typically performed by part-time legal counsel at the RI state house, who draft bills at the request of state legislators. Advocacy groups with their own expertise may choose to draft the bill themselves in collaboration with state legislators.

### Step 2: Bill Introduction (January-February of each year)

1. **Sponsorship:** A state legislator sponsors the bill by introducing it in their chamber (the House of Representatives or the Senate). It's highly recommended that you find a House sponsor AND a Senate sponsor to introduce identical versions of the bill.
2. **Committee Assignment:** The bill is referred to a relevant committee based on its subject matter (e.g., education, environment & agriculture, finance). If it requires spending money or altering the state budget, then it is usually referred to the Finance committee

## Step 3: Committee Review (March-May of each year)

1. **Committee Hearings:** Committees hold bill hearings where any member of the public can testify for or against the bill. People can submit written testimony via email too. Advocacy groups, individuals, and lobbyists use this opportunity to present data, stories, and expert opinions to sway committee members.
2. **Held for further study:** The first committee hearing of a bill pretty much always results in holding the bill for further study. Committee chairs and members use this time to review testimony from the hearing and work on any suggested amendments.
3. **Amendments:** If a bill is brought back a second time for a vote, committee chairs/members/sponsors can propose amendments to the bill, which they call a Sub A, before voting to send it to the floor.

## Step 4: Floor Vote

1. **Floor Debate:** The bill is debated and voted on by either the entire chamber. Advocacy groups may continue to lobby legislators during this stage to support or oppose the bill.
2. **Passage:** If the bill passes by a majority vote, it crosses over to the other chamber for consideration.

## Step 5: Second Chamber Consideration

1. **Committee Review:** The bill undergoes committee review in the second chamber, following a similar process of hearings and possible amendments. Just because a bill passes the House doesn't mean it'll pass the Senate, and vice versa.
2. **Floor Debate and Passage:** The bill is debated and voted on by all members of the second chamber. If identical versions of the bill pass both



the House and Senate, it proceeds to the governor to be signed into law.

## Step 6: Governor's Approval

1. **Signing:** The governor signs the bill into law. If the governor vetoes the bill, it can still become law if both chambers override the veto by a two-thirds majority vote.



## Example: The Blue Envelope Program

### An idea that started with a Westerly High School Student

Toby, a Westerly High School student, approached myself and Representative Azzinaro to introduce a bill that would help people on the autism spectrum. It would essentially mimic Blue Envelope programs in Connecticut, New Jersey, and several other cities/states. After two years of hard work, patience, and sitting in committees delivering powerful testimony, the Blue Envelope Program is being established in Rhode Island! I want to thank Toby and Pierce's teachers and parents for their support- it may be a trek, but the committee members were really touched by their testimony.

The two-year process, roughly, was:

- 2023: Rep Azzinaro and I introduce identical bills in the House & Senate. We each introduce the bills at the committee hearings (Veterans & Special Legislation committees), and Toby and Pierce testify in-person along with

other members of the public and people from the Governor's Commission on Disabilities

- 2023: House bill is substantially amended before passing through the House committee in the last week of the legislative cycle. We ran out of time to change the bill to match in the Senate.
- 2024: Rep Azzinaro and I introduce the amended bills, again identical, in the House & Senate. We go through committee hearings again; Toby & Pierce testify in both committees and so does Rep. Greg Howard from Connecticut, who speaks in favor based on his experience with the CT Blue Envelope program
- 2024: House bill is amended again slightly and passes through the House.
- 2024: A month or so later, I put forward a matching amendment and pass it through the Senate. The bills cross into the other chamber and pass again, for a final time.
- 2024: The Governor signs it into law. Now the DMV and police chiefs are working on implementing it.

Now imagine going through this for 25+ other bills in parallel, in one year! There's a lot of behind-the-scenes work that's also needed to ensure a bill moves forward.

## Connecting with Advocacy Groups

Offentimes there is a statewide advocacy group that you can join/volunteer with on a particular issue you care about. Advocacy groups usually only have a few paid staff who help organize volunteers. If you're passionate about something, feel free to reach out to me and I can probably point you to a group that's working on it.

## Past Meetings / Events



## Meeting with the Federal Railroad Administration about Commuter Rail

In a meeting with the Federal Railroad Administration, RI Dept of Transportation, Lt Gov Sabina Matos, and Secretary Tanner, we highlighted the benefits of extending commuter rail from CT to Westerly and then the rest of RI (economic mobility/access to jobs, tourism economy, sustainability) and got some information about federal grant programs. An encouraging sign of progress is the Westerly Station high-level platform project is slated for engineering feasibility study in the Northeast Corridor Commission's 5-year Capital Investment Plan. We still need to continue making the case for funding, since there are a lot of other projects throughout the country seeking funding.



## Homeless Veterans Pantry Ribbon-Cutting

Congratulations to the Westerly Elks and veterans committee on the ribbon cutting and grant they received to open up the Homeless Veterans Pantry. Right now what they need the most are clothing donations: there is a list here and you can have it shipped to them or drop it off in-person at 1 Dixon St, Westerly <https://www.amazon.com/registries/gl/guest-view/2NLYOJGENYA5M>





## **Legislative Grant for Cross Mills Library**

Glad to support Cross Mills Public Library in Charlestown with a legislative grant to purchase ebooks and audiobooks. Ebooks and audiobooks are booming in popularity, and I was glad to sponsor legislation to reign in the inflated costs big publishers charge to libraries.

Ebooks and audiobooks are also accessible materials for residents who are visually impaired or residents who don't have as many transportation options.





## Legislative Grant to The Village Common - Westerly

Happy to support The Village Common in Westerly. The Village Common fosters a community of people that help each other and/or help others in need (often seniors) with anything from grocery pickup, rides to doctor's appointments, or companionship. The services that volunteers provide help seniors remain independent for longer. We walked through Wilcox Park chatting about issues like aging in place, for seniors. Also, since the Village Common also supported ADU's, check out this Op-Ed in the Providence Journal about how housing issues hit seniors differently: <https://www.providencejournal.com/story/opinion/columns/2024/05/11/accessory-dwelling-units-help-older-rhode-islanders-stay-in-their-homes-and-communities-where-they-w/73605538007/>

## Upcoming Events / Places I'll Be

- **July 19th** RI Infrastructure Bank and Town of Westerly are highlighting the town's Municipal Resiliency Project (for more info: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/89c64c24ae3146fdaeca8067b6c0e3f7>)
- **July 21st 3pm:** Westerly Village Common's anniversary celebration
- **August 1st-3rd** Attending the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators to learn from other states' initiatives to promote a sustainable



future

- Ongoing meetings to set legislative priorities and revise bills for 2025
- Ongoing meetings with advocacy groups in both RI and CT to work together on bringing Shoreline East to Westerly and beyond
- **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!



## CRMC Enforcement At Work

CRMC staff have been working to remove the unauthorized posts and fencing at Green Hill Ocean Avenue in Green Hill.

If you have a concern or potential enforcement issue, call CRMC at 401-783-3370 or email [cstaff1@crmc.ri.gov](mailto:cstaff1@crmc.ri.gov) and put "enforcement" in the subject.

## Programs You May Apply for:

### Direct Pay for Clean Energy Projects

#### Nonprofit Associations eligible for Direct Pay in place of Tax Credits

A number of constituents have been reaching out to me asking about programs to help their condo association or another nonprofit organization adopt solar. Here's a starter resource on Direct Pay, a program to pay nonprofits for clean energy

projects. Instead of getting a tax credit like a person or business would, the nonprofit would get 30% back as a direct payment on the cost of the project (subject to certain caps): <https://www.whitehouse.gov/cleanenergy/directpay/>

Applicable entities can use Direct Pay for 12 of the Inflation Reduction Act's tax credits, including for generating clean electricity through solar, wind, and battery storage projects; building community solar projects that bring clean energy to neighborhood families; installing electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure; and purchasing clean vehicles for state or city vehicle fleets. See [a full list of applicable tax credits](#) for direct pay.

Read More About Direct Pay

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