

April 12, 2022

Senator Joshua Miller
Chair, Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Rhode Island Statehouse
Providence, RI 02903

RE: In support of S2765

Dear Chair Miller and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Housing Network of Rhode Island, our member agencies, and the low-income Rhode Islanders we seek to serve, I write in strong support of S2765, legislation that would create a plan and a timeline to replace all lead service lines statewide, leading to cleaner and safer drinking water for Rhode Islanders.

The Housing Network of Rhode Island is the State's membership association of 17 nonprofit community development agencies across Rhode Island. From Washington County to Woonsocket, our members have created more than 15,000 affordable homes serving thousands of low-income renters and homeowners. Our members are leaders within the communities they serve and have contributed to economic development, revitalization efforts, and the creation of healthy and vibrant neighborhoods in cities and towns throughout Rhode Island. Our organization and membership are committed to serving low-income Rhode Islanders, who are vital contributors to our economy and have the right to safe, healthy, and affordable places to live. HNRI also serves as the backbone organization for Homes RI, a collective impact effort focused on increasing the supply of safe, healthy, and affordable homes across Rhode Island.

Lead poisoning is a serious children's health and environmental justice issue with lifelong consequences, affecting hundreds of Rhode Island children every year. In addition to the well-known threat of lead paint in older homes and contaminated soil, contaminated drinking water from tens of thousands of remaining lead service lines statewide contributes to these levels. In fact, Providence Water, RI's largest water utility, has tested over the EPA action level for lead in drinking water for 15 out of the last 16 years.

RI is set to receive \$146 million from the bipartisan Infrastructure Bill for lead service line replacement and all associated costs. According to the EPA's "Economic Analysis Appendices for the Final Lead and Copper Rule Revisions" in 2020, the average cost of a full lead service line replacement is around \$5000. With these Infrastructure funds, RI could replace up to 29,000 lead

service lines over the course of the 5-year spending period. This is huge news, and an exciting opportunity for our state, that could result in cleaner drinking water for thousands of RI families.

However, to go with this historic investment, we need a solid and thoughtful plan. We want to make sure we get this right, because we may not get this opportunity again. The Lead-Free Water RI coalition, made up of community members and representatives from environmental justice and organized labor groups, wants to see this project undertaken as promptly, efficiently, and safely as possible, in a way that will help all of us, starting with the communities who need it the most.

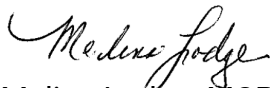
Senate bill 2765 would create this plan, setting a 10-year timeline for water utilities to replace lead service lines, and providing more opportunities for property owners across the state to take advantage of available resources. S2765 also sets standards and requirements for water utilities to report out numbers of lead service lines, and progress towards their replacement, as well as requiring that tenants and property owners be fully informed of the presence of lead service lines in their homes, and the associated dangers. In addition, S2765 requires the Rhode Island Department of Health and the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank to help water utilities seek additional funding, if needed, to complete all needed replacements, so the burden of payment does not fall on property owners, residents, or ratepayers.

I support this bill, and hope to see additions made as it moves forward regarding principles of environmental justice, a strong plan for community engagement and outreach, pathways for job creation, and assurance that residents and property owners will not have to pay for lead service line replacements. I look forward to seeing continued collaboration between legislators, community advocates, and other stakeholders to make sure our plan for clean drinking water is the strongest it can be.

Thank you to Majority Leader McCaffrey, and his fellow sponsors, and to the Health and Human Services Committee for taking on this important challenge and working to protect RI children and families.

I welcome questions from the Committee and can be reached at 401-721-5680 ext. 38 or mlodge@housingnetworkri.org.

Respectfully submitted,



Melina Lodge, MCP
Executive Director