



February 19, 2017

Dear Fellow East Siders:

I hope you are enjoying this weekend's respite from winter. This week's letter discusses the School Department budget, regulating the resale of Providence water, reforming the zoning laws regarding abandoned nonconforming uses and a response to President Trump's executive order banning travel by certain groups.

On February 8, the Education Committee received a [5-year budget](#) from the School Department projected escalating budget deficits that approach \$50 million in the last year. The School Department also provided a [detailed presentation](#) of each budget component. This information, which is largely driven by the recently approved expansion of Achievement First is of deep concern to the more than 20,000 students in the Providence Public Schools and their families. The Education Committee will schedule another hearing soon at which the Superintendent will discuss the educational impacts of this budgetary challenge.

As part of the recent discussions regarding the possible location of a doctor's office for suboxone patients in a residential zone, we learned that the zoning variance permitting this use remained valid despite many years of abandonment. In contrast, the City's zoning ordinance provides that any nonconforming use that pre-exists a zoning change remains in effect as long as it is not abandoned for a year or more. Because these two situations are substantially similar, it makes sense to treat them the same way under the zoning code. With that in mind, I have introduced an [Ordinance](#) which, if approved, would close this loophole by deeming nonconforming uses obtained by variances to be waived if the use is abandoned for a year or longer.

At its February 2 meeting, the City Council approved an [Ordinance](#) I introduced supporting the introduction and passage of State legislation to clarify that cities and towns that purchase Providence water must limit resale to customers located within the purchasing city or town. On February 16, our Senator, Gayle Goldin, introduced bill [S-334](#), which would, if enacted, achieve this policy goal. I am grateful for her support of this important issue and encourage you to [send her an email](#) acknowledging her contribution to improving our City.

The official [seal of the City of Providence](#) features the image of Roger Williams, a refugee escaping religious persecution, stepping onto the shore of a community he would found based on the principles of religious freedom and tolerance. Given our City's distinctive heritage, it is particularly painful to watch President Trump issue an executive order effectively banning travel by members of certain religious communities. While the courts have temporarily blocked the operation of the executive order on legal grounds, I believe the policies on which the order is based are especially repugnant to the values on which our City was founded. With that in mind, I introduced a [Resolution](#) expressing the City's concern with the executive Order. The City Council approved the resolution at its February 16 meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Samuel D. Zurier'.