

Standing Up for a Better Providence, Together

Intro:

Madam Council President, honorable members of the City Council, State Senators and Representatives, Department Directors, community partners and fellow neighbors of our great City of Providence –

I am happy to be here with you this evening to present my proposed budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

As we enter my fourth year of office, I am proud of all that we have accomplished as a community. Less than four years ago I pledged to prioritize the tangible, everyday needs of our neighbors. From streamlining and modernizing city services, building new housing, dramatically elevating public safety to simply ensuring that the day-to-day services you expect from City Hall are done right, the first time – we have built a City Hall that protects, listens to and works directly for our neighbors.

In this last year alone we have built new, state-of-the-art schools, made childcare more affordable, broke down barriers that hindered local businesses and advanced climate initiatives that lay the groundwork for a greener, more sustainable Providence for generations to come.

The budget proposal I am presenting tonight was carefully developed to further propel this critical momentum and build on this past year's successes.

But at the same time, as I stand here tonight with our community and think of all of those watching from home – I know that this last year was one of the most difficult, at times heart-wrenching periods our community has ever been faced with. From the turmoil of the Trump Administration that has threatened food security and brought dangerous, lawless actions into our neighborhoods putting the safety and wellbeing of our neighbors at risk - to the unmanageable costs of groceries, gas, utilities and housing – our community has been forced to endure what has felt like insurmountable obstacles.

Brown:

And then, in December, Providence was the center of a tragedy that I had hoped would never befall our city. In a senseless act of violence that took two young lives, Providence grappled with the aftermath of a tragedy that has become far too common in our country. But in those harrowing moments while our city was in the national spotlight – the people of Providence did what we are best at. We leaned on one another, supported one another and showed the country what makes our city so special.

To all those that responded in those first moments - Colonel Perez and the entire police department, Chief Silva and the entire fire department, Director Decerbo and the Emergency Management Agency and Director Radcliffe and the Telecommunications Department and the law enforcement agencies from across the state who showed up when we needed them - thank you.

To the City staff, non-profits and community leaders that have helped with recovery in the months since – thank you.

And to the first responders who arrived on scene within minutes, some of whom are with us here today – your bravery and selflessness saved lives, and we will forever be in your debt. **Can you please stand so we can all thank you for your service to Providence?**

The weight of this tragedy and the path to recovery after has not been carried by law enforcement alone. Despite living in a moment where the divides among us feel great – despite the mounting challenges we face every day, our neighbors stepped up. Local restaurants donated food, neighbors shared information and resources with each other, and our city came together as one. The unity and compassion of this community played an instrumental role throughout that week and in the months of recovery since. And when tragedy hit our state again in Pawtucket, our neighbors came together once again to show support and lend a hand in their recovery.

To every single one of our neighbors: thank you.

Budget Preview:

The rising challenges that our community members are facing every day were at the top of our minds as we developed this next year’s budget. We are in the middle of an affordability crisis that is impacting every aspect of our way of life here in Providence. While our neighbors need relief to stay in their homes and afford basic essentials – irresponsible decisions at the federal level are making the costs of everyday needs only go up.

The budget for delivering the city services our neighbors rely on has not been immune to those same rising costs. Like cities across the nation – Providence is grappling with a fixed budget and ever-increasing inflation. After a winter with record-breaking snowfall and the largest blizzard in Rhode Island’s history, we knew we would need to make tough decisions to balance the City’s budget.

Absent of ARPA funding and with a reduction of federal grant support – we minimized operating costs, reduced spending and learned to do more with less to avoid putting any further financial strain on our neighbors.

Because of those difficult decisions, I am proud to announce that the balanced budget I am proposing tonight does not raise taxes nor does it increase any fines.

Closing the budget gap in a year with historic inflation, high interest rates and aging infrastructure without increasing the cost of living on our taxpayers did not happen by accident. It took examining the budgets of every department to find ways to cut back without reducing investments in the services our neighbors need like trash pick-up and road repairs.

In the months leading up to this proposal I talked to constituents in every neighborhood. I listened to what services were working and asked where we were falling short. From increased support for our small businesses to financial relief for our parents with young children, every neighborhood’s concerns were unique. But the message I heard loud and clear from every corner of Providence was that our neighbors need financial relief.

Rent Relief:

At the heart of our affordability crisis is a shortage of housing that makes renting or owning a home increasingly difficult. For too many of our families, a temporary financial set-back can lead to eviction or displacement from their homes. They need support now – so that a medical emergency, job loss or simply the overwhelming costs of utilities does not leave them without the means to stay in their homes.

That is why in this budget I am proposing an investment in a rent relief program that will provide immediate relief for individuals in crisis. By offering our neighbors in crisis emergency grants of up to \$3,000, we are working to break the cycle of displacement and bridge the gap to long-term housing stability. And at the same time, we are investing in no-cost eviction defense and tenant education so that individuals facing emergencies receive the short-term relief and support they need.

Housing:

But short-term relief is not enough. The cost of rent in Providence is too high, and we know it will not meaningfully lower until we address the underlying cause of this crisis: the housing shortage. Providence needs to build more homes.

To give our neighbors the housing relief they deserve we set out to take bold actions to tackle this crisis head-on. We put in the work to speed up development and collaborated across levels of government and with our partners to leverage both private and public resources. And as a result, Providence is already on track to exceed the state's housing production target and is building more homes per capita than larger cities like Boston and New York City.

We streamlined the review process for housing development, adopted modern zoning changes to allow for greater housing density and we're making direct investments in affordable housing production across Providence. Since taking office, over 2,000 new housing units have been built across the city, and more are opening each month.

And to better protect the wellbeing of our tenants in these homes, I am proposing two new code enforcement positions in this budget that will hold our landlords accountable and ensure all of our neighbors live in clean, safe homes.

From the groundbreaking at the Omni Newark building last week that will bring in over fifty new affordable housing units into our city, to the soon to be opened Flynn building in South Providence – we are making meaningful progress. Once a vacant, blighted school, thanks to our investments in just a few short weeks the Flynn will be the new home for nearly 200 Providence families.

To continue that progress I'm putting a \$25 million dollar housing bond proposal on the ballot this year. Our neighbors need affordable housing options and to help us build more in every neighborhood we need you to vote yes this November.

Solving this crisis is complex and we know there is no single solution that will provide the relief we need overnight. Housing security is the foundation for community wellbeing, and that is why we are treating this crisis with urgency.

There is more work to be done but we are making tremendous progress.

Trump Administration:

In 2026, protecting the wellbeing of our neighbors also means standing up to the dangerous, unlawful actions of the Trump Administration. Now more than ever, it is incumbent on local leaders to step up and take action when the decisions made in Washington put the health and safety of our families at risk.

In November when the federal government failed to take action to protect SNAP benefits, threatening food security for thousands of our neighbors, 16,000 of whom are children, the City stepped up, filed a

lawsuit against the Trump Administration and for the first time, activated our Emergency Food Plan. We doubled the number of meals at our recreation centers, established a central hub of Providence-based food bank resources, provided transportation for seniors in need of food and directly allocated funds to the Rhode Island Food Bank.

When the federal government ramped up its reckless immigration actions in our neighborhoods, stoking fear and anxiety in our community – we took action. We signed an executive order that reinforced our commitment to invest in 24/7 emergency legal immigration support for anyone in Providence and reaffirming our commitment to protecting and serving all of our neighbors, regardless of immigration status.

And in January, as we watched ICE operations continue to unlawfully stir chaos across the nation – we stepped in again, signing an executive order prohibiting immigration enforcement on all City property. Because as your mayor, I will continue to do everything in my power to protect our neighbors from the reckless actions of the Trump Administration. And I'm not alone – local, grassroots advocates and non-profit organizations have stepped up to provide donations, legal expertise, and immigration support services to all who need it – proving once again why Providence is so special. **To the non-profit leaders with us here today who have joined our efforts to protect our neighbors, can you please stand up so we can thank you for all you have done for our community?**

Public Safety:

Keeping our communities safe begins with ensuring our public safety teams and their partners have the staffing, resources and training needed to ensure all those who live, work and visit our city feel safe.

We are fully staffing our police force with officers that represent the diversity of our neighborhoods and in just three years we have graduated three new academies, matching the total number of police academies in the previous eight years combined.

And we are putting in the investments needed to modernize our approach to safety. Last summer we launched the Real Time Crime Center – a centralized hub of technology that gives our officers the real-time tools and information they need to provide faster, more coordinated responses in every neighborhood.

The safety of our neighbors is my number one priority and I'm proud to share that our strategy is working. We have brought violent crime in Providence to a 30-year low – the lowest level of crime since we began collecting this data in 1990.

And we are not slowing down - last year we removed a record number of illegal guns off of our streets and out of our neighborhoods and this year we are already outpacing that record. We're cracking down on excessive sound violations that disturb our local quality-of-life and since the creation of our Community Response Team, Providence's ATV problem, which had long been a menace to the safety and peace of mind of our neighbors - is nearly non-existent.

In less than three years we have modernized our Fire Department – digitizing records, expanding our fleet of state-of-the-art rescues for the first time in a decade and increasing our capacity to meet the rising need for medical services.

And though we are doing everything in our power to ensure a tragedy like the Brown University shooting never impacts Providence again – through this budget we are investing in the modern equipment our first responders need so that our officers, firefighters and EMTs have the specialty equipment they need to keep us and them safe.

Quality-of-Life:

I also know that the well-being and quality-of-life of our neighbors goes beyond feeling safe. When I ran for office, I heard loud and clear from families in every neighborhood that they wanted to see the day-to-day city services they rely on done right.

We listened – and have structured our priorities around building a City Hall that more effectively meets the needs of our neighbors. From the creation of an in-person city services hub that addresses our most requested services, to bringing our government into the modern era by revamping our websites and digitizing our permits – city services in Providence have never been more effective.

We brought in equipment to dredge rivers to prevent flooding and invested in new asphalt machines that help our crews fill potholes faster and more efficiently.

In the past year we have fixed **11 miles** of roads, completed over **650** sidewalk repairs and filled over **5,000 potholes** in every corner of the city.

Through neighborhood meetings and 311 reports, we heard directly from our neighbors that when utility companies work on our roads, they often do so without notice, and without properly repairing the damage. In this budget I am proposing two new positions to hold utility companies accountable so that when repairs are needed, our neighbors are informed and our roads are fixed properly.

And just last month we launched the first-ever citywide replacement of new trash and recycling carts to improve recycling rates and further elevate our local quality-of-life.

From the creation of the innovative Urban Wood Depot in South Providence to the climate resiliency improvements completed at India Point Park we invested over \$14 million in parks and greenspace renovations in 2025, completing over 20 major projects in the last year alone.

And we're adapting to a changing climate so that our crews are ready for whatever nature throws our way. Two years ago, we made the responsible decision to purchase a fleet of heavy-duty snowplows and in a couple weeks those new trucks will finally be arriving. In preparation for the years ahead, in this budget I have expanded our investment in our snow and storm recovery fund so that when inclement weather strikes, it will not come as an unexpected expense to taxpayers.

Climate:

While the federal administration rolls back critical climate programs aimed at protecting our communities from extreme weather, my administration is making innovative investments in climate resiliency.

In Providence we are already feeling the urgency of the climate crisis. With thirteen flash flooding events in our city since taking office, extreme heat days that have closed school in September and the largest blizzard in our state's history just over a month ago – the time to act is now.

In the absence of federal leadership, we are making necessary investments in our infrastructure to mitigate the impacts of a rapidly changing climate and curb our reliance on fossil fuels – because our neighbors and local businesses should not have to bear the cost of another catastrophic weather event.

Two years ago, Providence led by example when I signed legislation committing to make all City-owned buildings completely carbon neutral by 2040 and just last week I announced that for the first time in Providence’s history we are establishing a dedicated funding source to invest in renewable energy and decarbonization. From new solar panels to upgraded infrastructure, the green revolving fund is an innovative new initiative that ensures we have the means to invest in energy efficient improvements throughout Providence.

Together we are paving the way for a healthier, more sustainable future for generations to come.

Education:

And when it comes to our youngest generation: improving educational outcomes for our students has been one of my administration’s top priorities.

That’s why we are expanding access to after-school opportunities, building modern, state-of-the-art school facilities and engaging with our community to learn exactly what our students and teachers need.

We’ve broken ground on new school facilities at Asa Messer, Mount Pleasant and Lima Stuart and work is underway at both Mary Fogarty and Robert Kennedy elementary schools. We’re investing in thoughtful infrastructure improvements to elevate student outcomes, and we’ll soon be cutting the ribbon on the City’s first Pre-K –8 campus built from the ground up at Spaziano.

Last year when we witnessed the federal administration defund education programs across the nation, I gathered mayors from across the region for the first-ever New England Convening on Universal Pre-Kindergarten. Together we shared best practices for educating our youngest learners and collectively urged the Trump Administration to better support education at all levels.

While we have more work to do, I am proud that through our efforts we have been able to achieve universal access to Pre-K for every Providence student that needs a seat – a commitment I made to our neighbors three years ago. Because when we invest in free and affordable Pre-K seats, we are setting our students up for success and dramatically reducing the cost of living for Providence families.

And most importantly for our families and students: we are doing everything in our power to bring Providence schools back to local control to give our students the high-quality education they deserve. From supporting systems that elevate student success, to collaborating with our partners in the School Board and developing a comprehensive plan to reintegrate the District back into local management – we are ready.

When we invest in early education and build facilities that better meet the needs of our community, our students succeed – and we are already seeing that progress. With us here today is an example of one of those success stories. Last year I was exceptionally proud to celebrate Bailey Elementary School’s outstanding Blue-Ribbon recognition. **Could Alicia Jones, the principal of Bailey Elementary please stand so we can celebrate all you have done for our students?**

Preserving Providence:

In a year that has too often felt heavy and divisive, we're also investing in the people and places that bring us together. As the Creative Capital, we are committed to supporting artists and investing in initiatives and programs that make our city vibrant and economically resilient.

Over the summer when Providence's iconic WaterFire faced economic turmoil, the City stepped in to purchase the WaterFire Arts Center and save this iconic piece of Providence's identity. This unique art installation has made our city a global destination and ensuring its long-term vitality is crucial to protecting Providence's vibrant arts culture.

And tonight I am proposing an investment in a new Cultural Festivals Fund to support and ensure the future of the creative celebrations that reflect and celebrate our diverse cultural backgrounds. These festivals strengthen our communities, bolster our local businesses and bring neighbors of all backgrounds together to celebrate what we love most about Providence. At a time when diversity, equity and inclusion programs are under attack by the federal administration, we are investing in efforts to celebrate our diversity to ensure the future of gatherings like our Dominican Festival.

I'm also proposing an increased investment in Providence's community libraries. Gathering spaces like the South Providence Library provide our neighbors of all ages and regardless of income with safe, equitable access to books, technology, career workshops and simply moments to come together with their community.

Conclusion:

This was a difficult year for many of our families. Turmoil at the federal level has spiked inflation, stirred division and left too many of our neighbors disillusioned with government as a force for positive change.

I've seen firsthand the anxiety and fear instilled in our neighbors from the increasing hate, violence and chaos coming from Washington and online. But as your mayor, I want to assure you that Providence is and will remain a safe, welcoming community for all who choose to live, work or visit our great city.

Through this budget we are proving that when the federal government lets us down – neighbors can look to local government to drive meaningful progress, deliver critical services, protect families and lay the groundwork for a better tomorrow.

Despite our challenges – we are tackling the issues our families care most about head-on. We're making childcare more affordable, modernizing city services, building a record number of affordable homes and supporting a public safety system that has made Providence the safest it has been in over three decades.

And in a moment where the world too often feels heavy and divided – we are investing in what brings us together.

Because together, we are building a safer, more resilient and more united Providence.

Thank you.