

# 'You are the advocates': Cicilline urges seniors to fight for elder care funding

BY: [CHRISTOPHER SHEA](#) - OCTOBER 10, 2023 5:01 PM



*David Cicilline speaks at the 15th Annual Senior Agenda Coalition Conference and Expo at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Warwick on Tuesday, Oct. 10, 2023. (Christopher Shea/Rhode Island Current)*

WARWICK — David Cicilline may be out of Congress, but he is letting Rhode Island’s seniors know he still has their backs and how they can continue to be a vocal constituency.

In a speech to a crowd of 300 people for the 15th Annual Senior Agenda Coalition Conference and Expo at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Warwick Tuesday, Cicilline touted capping

insulin prices for Medicare recipients at \$35 a month and allowing the national health insurer to negotiate drug prices when he worked on Capitol Hill.

“That took a big fight,” he told the crowd. “That chain of events wouldn’t be possible without the advocacy efforts of aging Americans and seniors living right here in Rhode Island.”

Though happy with the progress made, Cicilline is urging older Rhode Islanders to continue being vocal advocates on all issues that most impact them.

“You all have a great deal of power and influence on how public policies happen,” Cicilline said. “There’s a lot more work that remains to be done.”

Those issues? Increasing funding for Meals on Wheels, senior centers, and home care, along with free buses for the elderly and people with disabilities.

After serving 12 years in the U.S. House of Representatives, Cicilline retired at the end of May to become the new president and CEO of the Rhode Island Foundation. His new role leading the state’s largest philanthropic organization puts him front and center to tackle the state’s most pressing issues in education, housing, health care and other areas.

In addition to Cicilline’s speech, the expo included a panel on housing affordability. Panelists included Secretary of Housing Stefan Pryor; Rep. June Speakman, who chairs the Special Legislative Commission to Study Housing Affordability; and Housing Works RI Executive Director Brenda Clement.

Also speaking at the expo were Gov. Dan McKee, Lt. Gov. Sabina Matos, and 2nd Congressional District Rep. Seth Magaziner.

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Cicilline said he is still adjusting to his new job and plans to meet with stakeholders to determine where to better align grant funding to make a difference for Rhode Islanders.

"In the coming months, I'll be engaged with the public as we refine our strategies," he said.

Cicilline said it is crucial that seniors get better care as the state's population gets older.

As of 2020, the state has 182,486 residents who are 65+. This number is expected to increase by 65,000 each year. By 2030, the [Rhode Island Office of Healthy Aging](#) expects 247,578 residents — one in five Rhode Islanders — to be over the age of 65.

"The needs and priorities of aging Rhode Islanders must remain paramount," Cicilline said.



Around 300 people attended the expo. (Christopher Shea/Rhode Island Current)

Another issue touched on by Cicilline is the cost of housing across Rhode Island, and the nation overall.

[A 2023 report](#) from the state's Long Term Care Coordinating Council that more than 43,000 of Rhode Island's 115,000 elderly households are housing cost burdened — paying more than 30% of monthly income for rent, mortgage, and other shelter costs.

Vincent Marzullo, who serves on the board for the Senior Agenda Coalition of Rhode Island, said in an interview that he's hoping to see the government invest more in ways for people to age in their own homes.

"It's certainly more economical and reasonable than long-term care or assisted living and nursing homes," he said.

And while Cicilline may tout Medicare's ability to negotiate drug prices, Marzullo said it's still not affordable for someone on a fixed income.

"It's really a struggle and challenge to many older adults, especially heading out of COVID," Marzullo said. "We have to make sure that in this recovery that we're not left behind."

He added that investments in senior care also prove to be the "bellwether" for younger generations.

"We need to think about things more intergenerationally," he said.

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Though there are still plenty of issues ahead, Cicilline urged seniors in attendance to be vocal and to continually notify their elected leaders on what impacts them.

"You are advocates," Cicilline said. "The stories you have — the experiences you have — are some of the most powerful things and you need to share them."

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