

September 21, 2026

Via Electronic Mail

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Joint Committee on Economic
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The Hon. Michael Rodrigues, Chair
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The Hon. Aaron Michlewitz, Chair
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The Hon. Carole Fiola, Chair
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The Hon. Michael Soter
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Re: DCR Ice-Skating Rinks Leases

Dear Conference Committee Members:

As the conference committee continues its work, I write in strong opposition to section 135A of House 5576, *An Act Relative to Economic Development in the Commonwealth*.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) currently leases many of the Commonwealth's public ice-skating rinks. The lease terms require the operator to maintain and improve the facilities, while also prioritizing public access to rink time. The current leases are set to expire within the next few years.

In accordance with section 52 of Chapter 206 of the Acts of 2024 (Section 52), DCR will be issuing a request for proposals (RFP) for new, long-term leases of the state's ice-skating rinks. Section 52 requires a lessee to operate, manage, improve, repair and maintain the facilities. This provision recognizes that DCR is regularly underfunded and unable to properly maintain all the assets in its portfolio. As such, DCR often enters into long-term lease agreements to shift some of the obligations for the assets to a lessee.

Section 135A of House 5576 amends Section 52 in order to carve out four specific rinks in three municipalities and require DCR to offer the leases directly to those municipalities. I am

encouraged to see this language, unlike previous versions, does not exempt the municipalities from performing capital improvements, which would leave the burden on DCR. However, this amendment would set a bad precedent for other individual municipalities to seek similar exemptions on any number of DCR-related properties. It is also unfair to any other municipality that would be interested in a similar deal. While it may be appropriate in certain circumstances to offer municipalities a right of first refusal or a right to match lease proposals, it must be done in a fair and transparent manner with assurances that the facilities will be maintained appropriately. It is important that municipalities be held responsible for operations, maintenance and capital improvements with no expectation that DCR will provide funding, in the same way a private vendor would. At the end of the lease these properties must be returned to DCR control without the need for DCR to invest any money in ensuring the rinks are in operating condition.

More generally, the OIG has identified numerous pieces of legislation that have recently been filed, either as bills or amendments, to carve out specific DCR properties to be treated differently than other, similar properties. This makes it very difficult for DCR to manage its vast portfolio in a consistent manner. Similar assets managed by DCR should be treated similarly.

Therefore, I strongly urge the Committee to ensure this language does not appear in the conference report.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J S Shapiro', is positioned above the printed name.

Jeffrey S. Shapiro, Esq., CIG
Inspector General

cc (by email):

Adam Baacke, Commissioner, DCAMM
Nicole LaChapelle, Commissioner, DCR
Joshua Giles, Director of Government Outreach and Public Policy, OIG
Nataliya Urciuoli, Senior Executive Assistant, OIG