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Dear Neighbor,

I write this letter to you and all our neighbors to introduce myself. After the recent redistricting process that happens once every decade, I'll now be serving as your new State Senator. But before I ask for your support and your vote, *you deserve to know who I am, where I come from, and what I stand for*. All of us deserve to have elected officials we can rely on to be in our corner no matter what. I think the best way to get a sense of that from me is to know where my values come from.

The first thing you can say about me is that I really, truly care about our community. That comes from growing up in East Providence and living and working here my whole life.

I'm a Townie and proud of it.

My roots are true blue Rhode Island. All four of my grandparents were born here and so were my mom and dad. My dad, Thomas, was one of seven kids in the blended family his parents made; my mom, Janice Walsh, was one of four. I grew up as one of six kids with my sisters Kathy, Bette and Kerry, and my brothers Steve and Tom. Dad and Tom were both Marines, and sadly, both have passed on. Mom passed away just over a month ago, after residing in an assisted living home for the last year or so. Two of my siblings still live close by. In fact, Kerry now lives in the old family house where I grew up, on 7th Street right off Warren Avenue.

Our family was working class. Neither of my parents had the chance to finish high school, but they worked hard. My dad was a skilled tool and die maker at RICO in Bristol and at Neptco in Pawtucket, and my mom worked part time at Ann and Hope. Back then a blue-collar family could be solidly middle class. We had the necessities with few luxuries.

EP was a good place to grow up. Just as it probably is for you, my connection to our community began with the little things. When I was small, we lived a five-minute walk from Pierce Field. Some of us knew how to sneak in to watch the high school football games, get a treat at the snack bar (if anyone had any money), and learn that the Townies were the best, win or lose. Of course, early in my career I coached the Martin Middle School girls' basketball team, and I think the Wildcats are the best too!

So, there was plenty of fun growing up, but the most important thing I got from my folks was a strong sense of right and wrong. You could say that *showing real respect for others was our family's core value*.

I remember one time when those values — doing right and respecting others — made a huge difference for our family. When I was a teenager my dad's shop was out on strike for a long time. Struggling financially during the strike was a stressful situation for our family and we all had to pull together. My father was the first union president at RICO and when they broke the union, he never returned after the strike.

My sister Kathy was the first in our family to earn a college degree. She inspired me and her example made me see what a difference a good education makes in one's life, and that I could do it too. I was able to start at Providence College and finished my education by earning my bachelor's and my master's degrees at Rhode Island College.

It was in college that I discovered I wanted to be a teacher. I taught geography and American history at Martin when I began my career in 1990 and I've been teaching civics at the high school since 2001. I feel very fortunate to be able to have a career that allows me to give something back to our community. It's great to see kids come alive when they learn about things like how the Constitution makes a real difference in their own lives, or how current events don't just happen to them, but that they can be part of making change happen.

From time to time, I hear from former students who go out of their way to thank me for making a difference in their lives, it seems like I'm the lucky one. I couldn't be more grateful.

So, I've seen how important a good education truly is, and that's led me to do my best not only as a teacher, but also as an advocate for good schools. I've drawn upon my values of showing real respect for others and doing what I felt was right to improve local education. As an active member and leader of the East Providence Education Association I've *dedicated myself to making sure our school children have the quality of education they need to have the opportunity they deserve.* When local political budget maneuvers threatened to undermine that quality, the union and the community came together to fight back. And we won! Through outreach and dialogue and the hard work of organizing, the really damaging cuts were rolled back and our schools are once again on a sound footing. I think we can all take pride in the fact that our schools are now better places for our kids and our teachers to spend our days.

I am proud to be an active participant in my union – it runs in my family! NEA Rhode Island encourages members to get involved in their communities. As a former local president in East Providence and as vice president of NEARI, I would not ask others to do more than I am willing to do myself.

I started this letter talking about roots. But roots are not just about where we were first planted, they're about where we choose to grow them. Where we are born is luck, but where we choose to live and work and raise our families says a lot about who we are. I was lucky enough to be born in EP, but I have chosen to continue living here with my

husband, Len. He operates two seasonal small businesses. These choices you and I and our neighbors have made – to live and work and build families and businesses and community — are the *heart and soul of Townie Pride*.

For me, the values I've learned right here and tried to live by — *respecting others, standing together, and fighting for opportunity for everyone* — are what that pride is all about.

This is why I ran for Senate in 2018 and it's why I continue to fight for the things I believe in. Since being elected, we've accomplished so much, from the school construction bond that led to a brand-new East Providence High School, to the codification of *Roe v. Wade* into state law, to the elimination of the car tax, to the recently passed package of historic gun safety reforms, and so much more. I will consistently update you on important pieces of legislation and other happenings in the district and at the State House, but first I felt you should get to know my story and who I am as a person.

At the beginning of this letter, I said I was writing for one simple reason, but there's actually one more. I'm hoping we can meet – not only so that you can get a sense of who I am, but also so I can learn about you and your family. I've already been going door-to-door in your neighborhood, but in case I haven't spoken with you yet, I really hope you feel welcome to reach out with any questions or concerns or ideas you'd like to share. I'd love to hear from you!

Let me close with one last thing. When my civics students and I are discussing current events — about what's going on and what it means and how we can improve things — I like to say, “remember, if you don't vote, you can't complain.” *My students are really convincing when they say they can't wait until they have the chance*. I believe them. But meanwhile, it's up to us to show them how it's done.

And so, as we enter the election season, where we will have that chance to make a difference in our community, I look forward to getting to know you – and I hope to earn your vote in the Democratic Primary on September 13, 2022.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Valarie". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "V".

Val Lawson

P.S. If you want to get in touch before I'll be walking your neighborhood – I'd love it. You can reach me on my cell phone at 401.316.5666 or by email at vlawson814@gmail.com. It will be great to hear your ideas and to have a chance to answer any questions you might have. Thanks!