State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
State House, Room 224
Providence, Rhode Island 02903
401-222-2080

Lincoln D. Chafee
Governor

June 25, 2012

TO THE HONORABLE, THE PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE:

I am transmitting to the Secretary of State, without my signature, 2012–S 3035, as amended, "An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government."

This act would create the "category one memorial designation commission," which would designate certain memorials located on public property as having attained secular value.

This bill was crafted in response to a controversy in Woonsocket over a white cross displayed in front of the Fire Department headquarters. An organization called the Freedom from Religion Foundation asked the city to take the cross down because of its religious symbolism, and community members rallied in support of keeping the monument because of its secular value as a war memorial. This legislation reflects a communal wish to bestow certain historical, public monuments with a mark of dignity and respect.

While I believe there are good intentions supporting this bill, I want to make clear that no law should seek to intrude upon the inherent function of the judicial branch of government to interpret laws and apply them to specific facts and circumstances. It will be for the courts to decide whether any particular monument excessively entangles the state in religious matters, or expresses an inappropriate preference for one religion over another. Ultimately, this bill gives the community a voice in determining which monuments it believes deserve special recognition, but passing this bill does not change the fact-finding mission in which the courts must engage to resolve these questions.

For the foregoing reasons, I transmit this legislation without signature.

Sincerely,

Lincoln D. Chafee