

Tina Spears

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Dear Neighbor,

Determination and community. When I think about what sets Rhode Island apart, I think of those words. There have been tough times that tested me, but my community gave me strength and a chance at a better life. I've learned that determination and community can change your future.

That's why I'm running for State Representative for District 36 -- because our families deserve a brighter future. Charlestown, South Kingstown, Westerly and Block Island need a strong voice at the State House who understands the challenges families face, and who will stand up for us. I'd like to introduce myself and invite you to help win a stronger voice for our communities.

I learned determination at a young age in a household with caring, but also the challenges of substance abuse and violence. When the bank foreclosed on our house, we moved to Charlestown - and I found a community that became home.

Hard work and generous mentors made a huge difference. At 12, I started cleaning houses after school. I worked at Smith's Florist in Westerly, the Point Judith Country Club and many other jobs. I wasn't great at tests, but my teachers saw my spunk and encouraged me. When I saw an opportunity, I reached for it.

I joined Future Farmers of America (FFA) in high school, and it gave me focus. My love for the outdoors blossomed, and I met my husband, Frost, at CHARIHO Tech's agriculture program. I liked being on a team, and senior year we brought home the volleyball championship. My teachers helped me see college as a path forward, so I applied to be Washington County Fair Queen and won a tiara and scholarship money I desperately needed.

I worked full-time to pay for college - as a landscaper, custodian, and retail clerk. I graduated from the University of Rhode Island with a bachelor's degree in Ornamental Horticulture and Turfgrass Management, the first person in my family to earn a degree. **Educational opportunities and my teachers' belief in me changed my life, so you know I will fight for strong public schools and pathways to good jobs.**

Frost and I married in 1998 after he returned from the police academy, and a year later, we bought our first house in Charlestown. We love the natural beauty of southern Rhode Island - from endless hiking trails, fresh water ponds, like Watchaug and School House, to the wildlife preserve at Ninigret Park. We are truly blessed to spend family summers fishing, boating, quahogging and crabbing together.

In 2000 our son Taquonck was born, and every parent's worst nightmare became real. He suffered a brain injury at birth, and we learned he would face significant challenges due to his disability. We struggled as new parents, but we needed to be strong for our beautiful son. I left my job so I could learn to care for him, and a network of organizations and families facing similar challenges rallied around us.

When Taquonck started kindergarten, I got a part-time job at an agency that supported us: the Rhode Island Parent Information Network. I wanted to help families through their toughest times, as others had helped me. I helped parents navigate their child's medical needs and stand up to insurance companies. Soon, I was at the State House, telling lawmakers that the state needed to step up for our kids.

When he was 11, Taquonck passed away. We were devastated. His life solidified my commitment to fight for what is right. I learned that even if you are fiercely independent, we all depend on care from other people.

In 2013 I helped win support for caregivers through landmark Temporary Caregivers Insurance legislation. This law now gives Rhode Islanders paid leave when they need to care for a child or a family member who is seriously ill. **Our communities deserve a representative who will work with lawmakers to create real solutions for families like yours and mine.**

Winning TCI support for Rhode Islanders opened my eyes to the impact policy can have. I knew this work would be the rest of my career, so in 2018 I got a Master's in Public Administration from URI. I became the Executive Director of the Community Provider Network of RI, representing providers who support people with disabilities. Every day I see how broken our healthcare system is and how that sets seniors, kids and hard-working families back. Every day I fight for the people who need us most.

During these years, Frost and I had two more wonderful sons, River (15) and Ahanu (12). Anyone who has teenagers knows that each day brings a new adventure and sometimes another gray hair. My kids attend local public schools, just as my husband and I did, and our parents before us. My boys were the third generation to attend Charlestown Elementary School. Our teachers work hard, but our schools aren't getting their fair share of state resources, creating an unfair tax burden for local towns. **As your State Representative, I will fight for our fair share of state funding for our schools.**

In the summer, we reel in black sea bass, chase tuna at the gully, and take our boat to Block Island. Every year we see the storms increase, shorelines erode and seas rise. **Climate change threatens our communities and our fishing industry, and as your state representative I will work to ensure that the landmark Act on Climate legislation is fully implemented.** I will stand up for our environment and to protect our communities from climate change.

Like most parents, I'd love for my sons to raise their families nearby. But if Rhode Island can't create higher paying jobs and more affordable housing, I don't know if they will. And it isn't just young people. I'm grateful that my father-in-law lives on his own just up the street, but I worry that too many neighbors won't be able to age in their homes without investments in transportation and support services. **We need to build a strong economy that allows all Rhode Islanders to thrive in Rhode Island.**

Rhode Island is a wonderful state, and its southern communities are special jewels. When the people at the State House make decisions, they shouldn't just listen to the lobbyists, the corporations and the big developers. They should know how policy impacts our villages, our small businesses, our beaches, our forests and our daily lives.

I am running for State Representative because we deserve an advocate who will fight for a better future. I will bring people together to fight for our priorities - strong schools, good jobs, affordable housing and an environment that can sustain us. I will be a voice for integrity - standing up for what I believe in -- and for honest, transparent government. I will put partisan politics aside.

There is a lot at stake in this election. We have a chance to send a strong advocate to the State House who knows the needs of working families and will stand up for our seniors. I'd love to talk with you about your ideas for our state. **I'll be knocking on doors in every town in the district, and I look forward to meeting you! Or you can reach me at Tina@TinaSpearsRI.com or 401-329-6644.**

I respectfully ask for your support in the primary election on September 13th. And mark your calendars for November 8th because I plan to ask for your vote in the general election, too.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tina Spears". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "T" and "S".

Tina Spears