

**Testimony of Inspector General Jeffrey S. Shapiro, Esq., CIG
Regarding House 16, *An Act Relative to County Land Disposition*
Before the Joint Committee on Municipalities and Regional Government
July 22, 2025**

Chair Rausch, Chair Lewis, members of the Committee,

Good day.

I am Jeffrey Shapiro, the Commonwealth's Inspector General.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on a bill filed by my office – House 16, *An Act Relative to County Land Disposition*. This bill would provide clarity to a county land disposition statute that the OIG regularly works with. As it currently reads, that statute is ambiguous.

Currently, under Section 14 of Chapter 34 of the General Laws, when a county wants to dispose of real property by sale or lease it must first offer it to “the state.” That’s it, with no definition of who, when, or how. What agency? What state official? What method is to be used? Is it sufficient to ask my neighbor who happens to be a state social worker? The statute also fails to define a timeframe or manner by which the state must respond to the offer. This bill would clarify the requirement by stating that the offer must be made *in writing* to the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM). DCAMM would then be required to determine whether other state agencies have use for the property. The DCAMM Commissioner would have at least 90 days to accept the offer.

In my nearly three years as the Commonwealth's Inspector General, I have seen a lack of clarity lead to significant unintended problems and result in waste and abuse of public resources. For example, in our report on the Commonwealth's 20-year lease of the Star Store in New Bedford, we identified that the lines were blurred as to who was making the decisions. Although the state paid a large amount of rent for 20 years, it did not maintain the condition of the building. Thus, the state did not execute an end-of-lease purchase option for \$1.00. This lack of clarity led to a waste of millions of dollars in public funds and the loss of a potential asset.

Moreover, in theory, a county could satisfy the statute in bad faith by offering a property to a state agency that it knows has no use for the property or the resources to acquire it. The county could then continue with the rest of the process as outlined in the statute, potentially directing it to a favorite entity. Certainly, this could hamper the overarching principles of openness, fairness, and transparency.

Though I do not believe this to be an area of major concern, details and accountability matter. As I review areas looking for fraud, waste, and abuse, I believe this proposed language strengthens a statute by adding clarity to the process. I hope you will look favorably upon this bill.

With the permission of the chairs, I am happy to answer any questions.

Thank you.