



Rhode Island Manufacturers Association

The Economic Engine for Rhode Island

03/05/2024

The Honorable Joseph Solomon Jr.
Chairman, House Corporations Committee

Dear Chairman Solomon and Committee Members:

On behalf of the Rhode Island Manufacturing Association, I write in support of H-7086, which would strengthen the electric grid reliability and help reduce long-term system costs through a statewide, holistic approach to utility vegetation management. Our organization represents 1600 manufacturing businesses across Rhode Island employing 40,000 plus workers – all of whom are dependent on a highly-reliable, safe, and secure electric grid.

Tree-related damage is the number one source of power outages in Rhode Island and throughout the region. This bill will have a meaningful impact on Ocean State employers by reducing productivity, equipment, and other business risks associated with loss of electric service. Moreover, a more equitable, statewide approach to utility vegetation management will help reduce the likelihood of costly equipment damage and other service restoration costs ultimately paid for by local ratepayers. This is particularly important considering that serious storm damage can shut down manufacturing facilities and impairs their employees with the loss of power to do their jobs. Climate change is spurring more frequent and intense weather patterns, as well as new pests and fungi that make local vegetation more susceptible to disease and decay.

Importantly, this legislation does not create any new utility cost mandates. Our businesses are particularly sensitive to utility costs and H-7086 will facilitate more efficient execution of utility vegetation management and storm restoration activities across Rhode Island. Finally, we note that the regulatory process established by H-7086 provides for independent oversight by the state's ratepayer advocate; is highly transparent; and accommodates the viewpoints of local experts and the public at large. It also requires the utility to file their vegetation management standards and practices at least once every four years, allowing for adjustments in approach over time. Electric system reliability is paramount to a vibrant and competitive 21st century economy. This legislation represents one important tool that utilities can use to enhance grid dependability and public safety, and temper long-term energy costs, while ensuring independent regulation and oversight. We respectfully urge passage of this bill.

Thank you.

David M. Chenevert
Executive Director of the Rhode Island Manufacturers Association