



Via Electronic Mail

April 1, 2025

The Honorable Joseph J. Solomon, Jr.
Chair, House Corporations Committee
Room 101, State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: CLF **Supports** House Bill No. 5576 – Utility Thermal Energy Network and Jobs Act

Dear Chair Solomon:

The Conservation Law Foundation (“CLF”) appreciates the opportunity to comment on H-5576, the Utility Thermal Network and Jobs Act. We offer our support for the bill’s intentions and goals.

Founded in 1966, CLF is a member-supported non-profit advocacy organization working to protect public health and the environment and build healthy communities in Rhode Island and throughout New England. CLF supports policies that increase New England’s supply of clean electricity from renewable sources and help to achieve the greenhouse gas emissions reduction mandates of the Act on Climate.

Our legacy gas distribution system needs to transform. Even while the Public Utilities Commission (“PUC”) proceeds with its investigation into the future of the gas system,¹ it is time to envision and plan for a future in which we deliver heat to our buildings without a reliance on fossil fuels. This bill provides one mechanism—and there will need to be many forms of intervention—to accomplish that goal.

Functioning thermal energy networks have the benefit of not requiring a furnace for combustion. Instead, heat is captured through a geothermal heat pump and delivered to a building. Geothermal heating is a tried-and-true technology. Thermal heat networks have been utilized in some of the coldest urban areas of our nation. This bill seeks to combine two proven technologies to displace our over-reliance on the combustion of fracked gas piped into our buildings by replacing it with a network of geothermal heat. By networking multiple properties and buildings together, the collective cost of the transition, operations, and maintenance can be shared, rather than falling on individuals to shoulder the financial burden.

There are two additional considerations we would like to present to the committee in its review of this proposal:

¹ RIPUC Docket No. 22-01-NG.

- (1) **Maintain focus on pilot and demonstration projects before utility tariffs.** The practical outcomes of the legislation need to be tangible, on-the-ground experience of managing a transition away from our reliance on fracked gas.
- (2) **Consider non-utility ownership models for geothermal networks.** Decades of experience with an investor-owned utility show that the demand for financial return makes transitioning away from past investments difficult and in conflict with their profit motive. Municipal and public ownership models already exist and can be replicated. Rhode Island must be cautious in its approach to allowing private companies to profit from the infrastructure necessary to lead us out of the climate crisis. Their ownership of the infrastructure that contributes to the climate crisis has created financial and policy obstacles to the transition off of fossil fuels.

We recognize that bringing about a new carbon free economy is difficult and potentially costly. While we would have benefited from starting down this path twenty-five years ago, today is the next best opportunity to do so.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,



Jamie Rhodes
Senior Attorney, Rhode Island
Conservation Law Foundation

cc: Members of the House Corporations Committee
Representative Terry Cortvriend
Representative John Edwards
Representative Lauren Carson
Representative Michelle McGaw
Representative Jason Knight
Representative Kathy Fogarty
Representative June Speakman
Representative Jennifer Boylan