



MAYOR BRETT P. SMILEY
CITY OF PROVIDENCE

April 1, 2025

Honorable Rep Joseph J. Solomon, Jr., Chair
House Corporations Committee
RI State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Testimony in Support of H5576, Utility Thermal Energy Network and Jobs Act

Dear Chairman Solomon and members of the House Corporations Committee,

The City of Providence thanks Representatives Cortvriend, Edwards, McGaw, Knight, Spears, Fogarty, Potter, Speakman, and Boylan for sponsoring House Bill 5576 and for championing clean energy initiatives that prioritize climate investments in Rhode Island's most vulnerable communities.

The City of Providence supports the passage of H5576, entitled Relating to Public Utilities and Carriers – Utility Thermal Energy Network and Jobs Act. This bill takes a comprehensive approach to the energy crisis, simultaneously addressing concerns relating to the climate, justice, and jobs. It facilitates the development of networked thermal energy infrastructure in Rhode Island, propelling the just transition away from fossil fuels.

This bill would guide the public utility to invest in thermal energy, a clean, efficient, reliable, and quiet energy source that would justly expedite Rhode Island's transition from fossil fuels. In tandem with other statewide decarbonization measures, a greater reliance on thermal energy will help ensure that Rhode Island meets its Act On Climate emissions reduction mandate by slashing emissions from the highly polluting building sector.

The City of Providence is particularly enthusiastic about the centrality of environmental justice in H5576, specifically the commitment to locating pilot programs in frontline communities and heavy industrial areas. Ensuring that investment in clean energy and infrastructure is directed first and most to communities that historically have been – and continue to be – burdened by the cumulative impacts of poor air quality, historical disinvestment, and other environmental health hazards, is essential. This approach aligns with Providence's Climate Justice Plan and our commitment as the first Climate Jobs City in America.

Additionally, we recognize the urgency of clean energy initiatives and understand that prioritizing transitioning workers and their families in clean energy initiatives is critical to the long-term success of these projects. The City of Providence is thrilled to support H5576's emphasis on workers rights in the transition from fossil fuels, including the labor peace agreements and just transition standards for thermal energy networks. If this bill passes, access to these jobs will be prioritized for residents in communities that have been historically disinvested in by using registered

pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs, simultaneously bolstering economic growth and supporting an environmentally and socially resilient future. It is crucial to the health of our communities that we prioritize the transition of utility and legacy fossil fuel based-work to green economy careers that are family-sustaining.

For the aforementioned reasons, including the economic and environmental benefits, commitment to rectifying historical environmental injustice, protection of workers, and sustainable job creation, the City of Providence supports the passage of H5576. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Priscilla De La Cruz
Director of Sustainability