



Via Electronic Mail

March 21, 2024

The Honorable David Bennett
Chair, House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Room 135, State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: CLF **Supports** House Bill No. 7022 – Act on Coasts

Dear Chair Bennett:

The Conservation Law Foundation (“CLF”) appreciates the opportunity to comment on House Bill No. 7022, the Act on Coasts. We offer our enthusiastic support for this bill.

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 the state’s capacity for mitigating against and planning for the impacts of climate change.

The effects of climate change have already reached all 400 miles of Rhode Island’s coast. We have seen severe flooding plague the entire state this fall and winter, erosion at our beaches, rising sea levels, and loss of power from storms. Tidal flooding in some areas of Rhode Island has increased by 380% since 2000, damaging roads and infrastructure.¹ Extreme weather events are increasing in severity and frequency. The Act on Coasts requires resiliency planning efforts essential for Rhode Island’s communities to plan for, mitigate, and adapt to climate change.

This bill charges the Chief Resiliency Officer and the state resiliency office with developing a statewide resilience plan in cooperation with the Executive Climate Change Coordinating Council (“EC4”). This plan will be developed in coordination with federal, state, and local governments and non-government agencies, and with robust stakeholder engagement that includes scientific, business, and environmental justice communities in Rhode Island. Leadership and coordination on resilience needs to happen at the state level to best empower and equip municipalities with the resources and knowledge for implementation at the local level.

The Act on Coasts requires that the state provide technical assistance to municipalities and state agencies for the implementation of resilience policies. Crucially, the bill enables state agencies

¹ *Rhode Island’s Sea Level Is Rising*, SeaLevelRise.org (last visited Mar. 21, 2024)
<https://sealevelrise.org/states/rhode-island/>.

and municipalities to pursue federal and other funds to invest back into resilience solutions for Rhode Island. This bill would also establish an advisory board on resilience for ocean and riverine coasts to assist the EC4.

The Act on Coasts would build on the work of the Resilient Rhody and Municipal Resilience Programs, which have been driven by the Department of Environmental Management and the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank. While these programs are great starts, the last statewide resilience plan was released in 2018, and climate conditions have escalated since then. Crucially, this bill mandates that the resilience plan be reviewed at least every two years, ensuring Rhode Island stays a nimble leader in climate planning.

The Act on Coasts would provide planning for all of Rhode Island, not just beach communities in South County. Urban and inland areas like Providence are particularly vulnerable to flooding.² All Rhode Islanders will benefit from investment into resilient ecosystems and infrastructure, and the time for that is now.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,



Erin Ritter
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Conservation Law Foundation

cc: Members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Representative Katherine Kazarian
Representative Julie Casimiro
Representative Megan Cotter
Representative Edith Ajello
Representative Matthew Dawson
Darrèll Brown, Vice President, Rhode Island, Conservation Law Foundation

² Andrew Binder et al., *Providence's Vulnerability to Floods: Impacts of Sea Level Rise, Stronger Storms, and Heavier Rainfall*, Rhode Island Medical Journal (Nov. 2021) available at <http://www.rimed.org/rimedicaljournal/2021/11/2021-11-60-climate-commentary-binder.pdf>.