



**RHODE ISLAND**  
**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT**

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March 21, 2024

The Honorable David A. Bennett  
Chairman  
House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

**RE: H 7022 An Act Relating to Waters and Navigation – Act on Coasts – Coastal Resiliency**

Dear Chairman Bennett,

Thank you for providing the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) the opportunity to comment on H 7022, which would codify the state's Chief Resilience Officer (CRO) in statute and require the CRO to take certain actions. DEM supports this legislation with technical amendments.

In 2023, Governor McKee signed Executive Order 23-07 entitled "Rhode Island Resilience 2023" which directed DEM to recruit and hire an individual to serve as CRO. It also directed the CRO to:

1. Coordinate resilience efforts across state agencies, municipalities, business, and other organizations;
2. Advise the RI Executive Climate Change Coordinating Council RI(EC4) on the status and effectiveness of [resilience] efforts;
3. Draft state policies on resilience and implement such policies under the direction of the RIEC4;
4. Serve as the primary voice and advocate for state actions on resilience; and, among other activities,
5. Provide biennial reports to the RIECR4, the Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the President of the Senate, on the State of Resilience in Rhode Island, with the first report to be submitted by December 31, 2024.

In the time since the Executive Order, DEM has hired Kim Koriath to serve as Rhode Island's CRO and she began work at DEM in January of this year. As the numerous flooding events and coastal storms this year have demonstrated, there is a critical need for state government to partner with municipalities and other entities to improve the resilience of Rhode Island to various natural disasters and the effects of climate change. The CRO serves as the point person within state government coordinating the programmatic efforts within multiple agencies and to assist municipalities as they work to address the specific needs of each community.

DEM welcomes the opportunity to work with the bill sponsor and Committee to support development of this important legislation and to address technical issues that we have identified. For example, the bill references the CRO and a state resiliency office but does not specify which department is to house and support these entities (the bill explanation designates DEM, but this is not mentioned in the bill itself). We would also like to ensure that the timing of certain efforts required by the legislation is consistent with

the timelines included in the Governor's Executive Order. Additionally, we would like to ensure that support for inland resilience concerns (such as urban heat, wildfire, and drought) is emphasized within the bill as well, alongside our state's pressing coastal concerns.

Finally, we hope to work closely with the bill sponsor and Committee on this much needed resilience codification with regard to recent and ongoing agency efforts on resilience, such as the re-engagement of the inter-agency Resilience EC4 Subgroup.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on this legislation and would be pleased to work with you to address the issues raised in this letter. Please feel free to contact Ryan Mulcahey, DEM Director of Legislative Affairs, at [ryan.mulcahey@dem.ri.gov](mailto:ryan.mulcahey@dem.ri.gov) should you have any additional questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Terrence Gray". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Terrence Gray, P.E.  
Director

cc: Members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources  
The Honorable Tina Spears  
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House  
Lynne Urbani, House Policy Director