



**MAYOR BRETT P. SMILEY**  
**CITY OF PROVIDENCE**

March 21, 2024

Honorable Rep David A. Bennett, Chair  
House Environment and Natural Resources Committee  
House of Representatives  
State House  
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: Testimony in Support of H7617, Building Decarbonization Act**

Dear Chair Bennett and members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

The City of Providence thanks Representatives Kislak, Cortvriend, Fogarty, Carson, Speakman, McEntee, Spears, Morales, McGaw, and Felix for sponsoring House Bill 7617 and supporting decarbonization efforts in Rhode Island.

The City of Providence strongly supports the passage of H7617, entitled Relating to Health and Safety – Building Decarbonization Act of 2024. This bill would establish an energy benchmarking program for large buildings in Rhode Island and set a subsequent standard for building energy performance, accelerating decarbonization statewide.

The building sector accounts for 30% of the state’s greenhouse gas emissions, a daunting figure given that Rhode Island currently has no clear pathway to reduce these emissions. A building energy benchmarking requirement like in H7617 is the most effective strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from large buildings. The building energy usage data created by the passage of H7617 will assist building owners in implementing strategies to reduce energy use and cumulatively, this reported data will inform the building energy use standard requiring buildings throughout the state to reduce emissions in line with the Act On Climate.

Notably, this bill will also support Providence in its implementation of the recently<sup>1</sup> passed Carbon-Neutral Ordinance for Municipal Buildings that requires the phasing out of fossil fuels by 2040. The City is also working to design and implement a Building Energy Reporting Ordinance (BERO) program that require building owners of large commercial, institutional, and multifamily buildings to report their energy use to the City for public disclosure—the state as whole should follow suit. Gathering and disclosing energy use data, permits building owners to better understand their energy use and identify opportunities for cost-saving energy efficiency improvements.

The City of Providence is also enthusiastic about the bill’s provision that the Housing Resources Commission ensures that building upgrades or retrofits would not compromise affordability of housing or electricity.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2024/03/12/metro/providence-carbon-neutral-2040-plan/>

We urge you to recognize the futility of further delaying bold, future-oriented climate action such as this bill. We cannot afford to waste any further time deliberating – the impacts of climate change are here. Every day spent burning fossil fuels adds to the cumulative impact of climate change in the future and for our next generation. For the aforementioned reasons, including the important role that building decarbonization plays in meeting Act On Climate mandates and the grave consequences of further delaying bold climate action, the City of Providence strongly supports the passage of H7617. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Priscilla', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Priscilla De La Cruz

Director of Sustainability