

DATE: March 19, 2024

TO: Representative Bennett, Chair
House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Rhode Island House of Representatives

SUBJECT: Support for H7617 – The Building Decarbonization Act

Dear Chair Bennett and members of the Committee,

With buildings being second only to transportation as a source of GHG emissions in Rhode Island, H7617 is an essential step in mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and achieving the Act on Climate targets. From personal experience and extensive reading, I am convinced it will also save Rhode Island residents a lot of money in the years ahead.

Section 1, Building Benchmarking & Performance Improvement, requires large buildings to report their energy usage to the state. It is time for Rhode Island to join the growing number (already more than 70!) jurisdictions that have implemented building energy reporting or emission reduction standard policies. It makes the most sense to implement these policies on a statewide basis, in line with the Act on Climate.

Section 2, Phase in of All-electric New Construction, is essential if we are to avoid making the GHG emission problem worse and avoid making life unnecessarily expensive for building owners and residents in the not-too-distant future. If we are to reduce state-wide GHG emissions 45% by 2030 and to net zero by 2050, we should be encouraging builders to install cost-effective heat pump technology now instead of adding the capacity to burn more fossil fuels. They should at least be required to wire new buildings from the start to accommodate the electric appliances and EV charging that residents will surely want in the near future. To do otherwise is to be penny wise and pound foolish. All-electric new construction is already better for our climate and our health. In the vast majority of cases, if an honest assessment is made, it is better for our wallets too.

In my lifetime, I have seen lobsters disappear from local waters and coral disappear from tropical waters. In the late 20th century I enjoyed cross-country skiing at the Monastery and along the Blackstone every year. This year and last, there was so little snow that I never put on my skis. Down south, there is too little cold weather for Georgia to produce a good peach crop, and up north the maple syrup industry is threatened. Winter is no longer what it was. Nor is summer. When we moved to Rhode Island, an attic fan was enough to ensure a nice sleep nearly every summer night; now air conditioning is often required. Building electrification is essential if our grandchildren are to enjoy as nice a world as we had. And electrification makes a lot of economic sense today. We put in our first heat pump when heating oil spiked to \$4/gallon, and that decision has saved us a lot of money since then. Our house in Cumberland is more comfortable today and will sell for a higher price because of the heat pumps we have installed.

To meet the Act on Climate targets, and to keep buildings affordably comfortable in a warming world, we must move building practices in the direction charted by H7617. I respectfully urge the Committee and full General Assembly to vote in favor of its passage.

Sincerely,

Kevin O'Neill
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