

March 21, 2024

Representative David A. Bennett
Chair, House Committee on Environment & Natural Resources
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02908

Re: The Nature Conservancy Supports H 7616 on Building Decarbonization

The Nature Conservancy is a global organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. We have chapters in all fifty U.S. states and in nearly 80 countries around the globe. Here in Rhode Island, we steward more than 14,000 acres of protected land, and we have partnered to protect 35,000 acres of land. At The Nature Conservancy, we realize that we cannot succeed in our core mission to protect the land and water on which all life depends without engaging seriously with climate change.

Under the 2021 Act on Climate, we must fully decarbonize our economy by 2050, with defined emissions reductions targets between now and then. Act on Climate sets science-based mandates but does not prescribe how we get there. Emissions from buildings are estimated to be 30% of total greenhouse gas emissions in the state, and therefore are a critical piece of the puzzle in the full decarbonization picture.

This bill accomplishes a few key items that we fully support:

- Benchmarking energy usage for large buildings – As a science-based organization, we recognize the need to make decisions based on data. Empowering building owners to measure and manage their energy usage and emissions can lead to informed decisions moving forward on energy use and its environmental impact. It also provides the State with data that can guide the development and implementation of programs to reduce the energy use of large buildings. With this increased data, the State can better tailor programs to the needs of our actual commercial buildings – which will enable more cost-effective program implementation and lower the costs to operate large commercial buildings through greater energy efficiency.
- Standardize building performance – This would require the Office of Energy Resources to analyze data, engage with stakeholders, and create targets for energy and emissions reductions. Building performance standards ensure that buildings can gradually reduce their climate footprint over time – replacing systems and improving energy efficiency as it makes sense for building operators. These standards are not prescriptive about how building owners make the upgrades and changes and allow for flexibility in implementation and technology. The standards would be informed by several years of benchmarking data made available to the Office of Energy Resources through this same legislation.
- All electric new construction – As our economy moves away from traditional fossil fuels, it is imperative that buildings be ready for electrification. In order to meet emissions reductions mandates, we cannot continue to build fossil fuel-based infrastructure.

If we are to meet the science-based goals of the Act on Climate legislation, we will need to drastically reduce the energy use of our existing building stock and also decarbonize future buildings. This policy will put us on a sensible path to do that within the timeframe we need to act.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,



Angela Tuoni
Climate Programs Manager
The Nature Conservancy in Rhode Island