

Rhode Island Farmers for Climate Action
68 Shaw Road
Little Compton, RI 02837

March 21, 2024

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

Dear Chair Bennett,

We are the Rhode Island Farmers for Climate Action and we are writing in support of House Bill 7617, The Building Decarbonization Act.

We are a coalition of Rhode Island farmers urging you to take action on the climate crisis. Unchecked carbon emissions will wreak havoc on our ability, as farmers, to reliably and profitably produce food here in Rhode Island. Inaction threatens our farms, our businesses and our ability to grow food for our fellow Rhode Islanders. We support and advocate for policies that move Rhode Island in the direction of a net zero carbon economy as quickly, justly, transparently and affordably as possible. The Building Decarbonization Act fits all of those criteria.

House Bill 7617 sets out a long overdue pathway to begin to decarbonize our building sector here in Rhode Island. The bill also maintains technical flexibility where needed. Most importantly, this bill addresses the critical justice and equity considerations such a transition requires. All of these reasons warrant your Committee to approve and move forward with the legislation.

The Building Performance Standard

You can't manage what you can't measure. A standard to begin to measure how our large buildings use resources statewide is long overdue.

Environmental Justice Advisory Board

The creation of the environmental justice advisory board is also long overdue. It is no secret that those communities in Rhode Island that already face inequity and injustice in economic, environmental AND social realms will also be on the receiving end of the worst outcomes that an unmitigated warming climate will dole out. When viewed from that perspective, the climate crisis is first and foremost a justice and equity crisis. We must give frontline and disadvantaged communities access to Rhode Island's climate change adaptation and mitigation decision making process. This bill does just that.

All-Electric New Buildings

It is our hope that measures taken today to address Rhode Island’s housing crisis will result in significant new construction activity over the next decade. That new construction should be built right the first time. “Built right the first time” to us means either phasing in construction methods that make future electrification of our newly built housing easy and affordable, or building all-electric new construction as soon as feasible. This bill addresses both of those imperatives. We need to make sure we are not building the affordable housing we desperately need today, but creating the need for expensive renovations and retrofits in coming decades.

On a personal level, among us farmers, many of us have installed heat pumps on our farms and in our homes. We have been incredibly satisfied with the performance of the equipment especially the unparalleled efficiency and cost-effectiveness of heat pumps. Some of us have been using electric cooking methods for years, including induction burners. One of us started bringing a portable induction burner to farmers markets for sampling food more than a decade ago. None of us who have used induction cooking have any plans to ever buy new combustion-based cooking equipment again. The technology is superior.

On an aspirational level, this bill stokes hope in us that we can create a future that is healthier, safer and more just for future generations of Rhode Islanders. Eliminating carbon monoxide poisoning and improving air quality - both indoors and outdoors – are worthy goals within our technological reach today.

We urge you to move forward with House Bill 7617.

Sincerely,

Rhode Island Farmers for Climate Action
c/o Andrew Morley, Sweet and Salty Farm