

DATE: March 19, 2024

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

SUBJECT: Support for H7782 – The Clean Heat Standard Act

Dear Chair Bennett and members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for the Clean Heat Standard Act. This bill is being debated at a time when cleaner heating methods are truly available at scale, can save Rhode Islanders money, and are necessary to achieve the goals in the Act on Climate. In other words, it is an act that goes with the tide rather than against the tide.

We have some catching up to do with the rest of the world and the rest of our own country. Nearly half of all Nordic homes, and 90% of Japanese homes have heat pumps. So, we know they work in a climate like ours. Only 13% of US homes have heat pumps, but since 2019, over 100,000 have been installed in Maine, where they are aiming to install another 275,000 by 2027. Why? Because they are more economical than furnaces burning fuel oil or propane. That was the reason I first installed heat pumps at my house in Cumberland. We have added more heat pump capacity in recent years as we have grown to appreciate the better comfort and economy they deliver year round.

The proposed clean heat standard will require gas utilities and oil and propane dealers to provide customers with gradually increasing percentages of clean heat services, phasing out the sale of fossil fuels. This is essential to slow climate change. Fast action is needed on that front. That is why the leaders of nine state environmental agencies, including our own, recently joined forces to ensure heat pumps account for 65% of residential-scale heating, air conditioning and water heating shipments by 2030 and 90% by 2040. I applaud their initiative and courage in taking that step, and I hope the RI legislature will back up RI DEM's ambition with the clean heat standard.

I expect that many Rhode Island homeowners with a furnace and fuel tank in the basement will, like me, keep that equipment in place when they install heat pumps. In ordinary times we will use our heat pumps to save money and stay comfortable. On extraordinary days -- when the heat pump suddenly needs to be repaired, or ISO New England asks us to briefly reduce electricity demand, or a fallen tree or branch has knocked out our connection to the grid -- we, or our heating supplier, will find ways to turn the furnace back on. (Did you know that a tiny generator, or a few old batteries, or an EV, can power a furnace for a day or more? It's good to have backup!)

I support H7782 because:

- It will create a sustainable funding mechanism for electrification
- The mandate is on the heating suppliers who have, or should have, the expertise to when and how best to deliver what we really want -- clean heat.
- Equity can be built in. The bill requires that 40% of the clean heat credits be delivered to low- and-moderate income consumers
- Rhode Island will have the advantage of learnings from larger and earlier markets taking the same approach. Vermont and Colorado have already adopted a clean heat standard, and Massachusetts is currently creating one through regulation.

I respectfully urge the Committee and full General Assembly to vote in favor of its passage.

Sincerely,

Kevin O'Neill
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