



April 4, 2024

The Honorable David A. Bennett
House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith St.
Providence RI, 02903

RE: Bill Number: 7729 AN ACT RELATING TO AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY -- AGRICULTURE FUNCTIONS OF DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Dear Chairman Bennett and Honorable Members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee:

I am writing to express our concerns regarding the proposed changes to the chapter on agricultural functions of the Department of Environmental Management, specifically the provision to provide a definition for "agricultural land" and to remove the definition of "farmer." While we appreciate the intent behind these changes, we are concerned about the potential impact they may have on municipalities, particularly those with significant agricultural sectors.

The League represents members who are deeply invested in our local agricultural community, so we understand the importance of clarity and consistency in regulatory frameworks. However, we believe it is crucial to ensure that any changes made to definitions and regulations take into account the unique circumstances and needs of municipalities across our state.

One of our primary concerns is the potential impact on the eligibility criteria for agricultural designations, incentives, and exemptions within municipalities. The definition of "agricultural land" plays a critical role in determining which areas are eligible for such benefits. It is essential to ensure that the definition is sufficiently broad to encompass diverse agricultural landscapes while also providing clarity to landowners and regulators.

Additionally, the removal of the definition of "farmer" raises concerns about how eligibility for assistance programs, grants, or tax incentives related to agriculture will be determined. This change could inadvertently exclude certain individuals or businesses engaged in agricultural activities within our municipality from accessing valuable resources and support.

Furthermore, we are concerned about the potential for unintended consequences that could disproportionately impact municipalities with significant agricultural sectors. Changes to regulatory definitions and criteria must be carefully considered to avoid placing undue burdens on agricultural communities and hindering their ability to thrive.

We urge you to carefully consider the potential impacts of these proposed changes on municipalities and engage with stakeholders, including local government officials, farmers, and community members, in the decision-making process. By taking into account the perspectives and concerns of those directly affected, we can work together to ensure that any changes made to agricultural regulations support the sustainability and prosperity of our agricultural communities.

On behalf of the League of Cities and Towns, thank you for considering our testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David M. Bodah".

David M. Bodah
Associate Director

Cc: House Environment and Natural Resources
Nicole McCarty, Chief Legal Counsel
Ernie Almonte, Executive Director, RILCT