

Testimony in support of House Bill 5098, House Environment And Natural Resources Committee, February 6, 2025, by Peter Trafton, Providence Rhode Island

Dear Chair Bennett and Honorable members of the House Environment And Natural Resources Committee, **I write with strong support for Representative Cotter's House Bill 5098, the Forestry and Forest Parity Act.**

At a time when Rhode Island's forests are threatened by climate change, forest fires, drought, and multiple pests and diseases, as well as fragmentation and inappropriate repurposing, we need to encourage and facilitate foresters and loggers, both in short supply, to retain their services for keeping our forests safe and productive.

Rep Cotter's bill extends to forest workers the same benefits that it already provides to farmers. Specifically, it limits sales taxes on their necessary equipment, reduces their forest vehicle license charges, and provides the benefits of our Right to Farm laws. These are not excessive and unusual benefits. They are very similar to those of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and other New England states.

As explained in the bill's Legislative Findings, Rhode Island's forests are vital for maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem services including carbon sequestration. *Our forests are more likely to be maintained if they provide economic value.* **There are Rhode Islanders who fear that forest workers threaten our forests. They plead for purely passive forest management and want to eliminate, forever, active management (cutting any trees) in our state.**

However, ample evidence supports the need for active forest management in response to the many threats listed above. This is stressed by recent publications about New England forests such as "[Beyond the Illusion of Preservation](#)", by a group of senior New England foresters including David Foster and Brian Hall from Harvard Forest, Anthony D'Amato from the University of Vermont, and others (March 2024). They urge that we expand ecological forestry, while limiting passive forestry to smaller areas of protected wildlands. These too are essential, but sustainable wood production from working forests requires silviculture selected for specific forest sites and goals. This will require Rhode Island to have enough skilled foresters and loggers, as well as knowledgeable supervision from private, state and municipal forest managers. Rhode Island's forests need skillful forestry, just as we also need local agriculture. We do our forests no favors by continuing an inhospitable economy for their caretakers. We must preserve them for the forest products we depend upon, as well as their many non-monetary benefits.

Please support the Forestry and Forest Parity Act, Bill 5098!

Thank you for considering my comments.

Respectfully,



Peter Trafton