

February 6, 2025

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

Re: The Nature Conservancy Supports H 5099 on Landscaping and Pollinators on State Roads

Dear Chair Bennett and members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

The Nature Conservancy **supports** H 5099, which would authorize and empower the department of transportation to plant pollinator-friendly species of trees, shrubs, grasses and plants, specifically native species to Rhode Island. We thank Representatives McGaw, Speakman, Boylan, Carson, Kislak, Cortvriend, Spears, Donovan, Alzate, and Fogarty for sponsoring this legislation.

The Nature Conservancy is a global organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Here in Rhode Island, we steward more than 14,000 acres of protected land. We do much of our work to protect and restore our natural environment in partnership with the Department of Environmental Management, the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank, our federal agencies, and local partner organizations.

In 2016, the General Assembly passed a resolution to create a Pollinator Working Group. The Working Group submitted two reports to the General Assembly in 2017 and 2018. Their first report recognizes that “there is little doubt that pollinators have been in decline in both species and abundance for some time and the state must begin to address these problems without delay.” It further points out that “pollinator decline is caused by several interrelated factors: **habitat loss**, poor nutrition, parasites and disease, pesticide use, and the changing climate.” (emphasis added).

In the section on Pollinator Habitat the report recommends, “Roadsides represent potential significant pollinator habitat. The Pollinator Working Group is meeting with the RI Department of Transportation to explore opportunities for pollinator-supportive construction and restoration standards and roadside management/maintenance practices.”

It is our understanding that no action has been taken as a result of these meetings with RIDOT, but that amending this statute to include pollinator habitat along state roads and highways would be a necessary next step to act on this recommendation. It is also our understanding that this legislation would be a cost-neutral proposal – simply replacing plants currently used for beautification with those that provide benefits to RI-specific pollinators. There is potential for reduced costs as it could reduce the need for mowing in some areas. This legislation also builds on the work you accomplished in 2022 to protect pollinators by regulating harmful neonicotinoid pesticides.

Massachusetts has been planting pollinator-friendly species along their roadways and it has made a noticeable difference. Many highways are now surrounded with and part of a natural, self-sustaining landscape.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this comment and support this legislation. I am available for any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Angela Tuoni".

Angela Tuoni
The Nature Conservancy in Rhode Island
angela.tuoni@tnc.org