

House Environment and Natural Resources Committee

Testimony in OPPOSITION to H5607 – re: Definitions of Farmer and Agricultural Land in Wetlands Law

By Jane Kenney Austin, 26 Narragansett Bay Ave., Warwick, RI 02889

March 20, 2025

Dear Members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee

I am writing to oppose the passage of H5607 which eliminates the definition of “Farmer” and incorporates “land used for forestry or timber production” in the definition of *agricultural land* for DEM in RI GL Sec. 2-1-22, a section dealing with wetlands regulation.

The bill carries no explanation of the purpose or intent of the changes and the implications for the other sections of RI General Laws in which these terms appear.

Farmers are accorded significant leeway in the application of the state’s wetlands regulations in cases where their activities are deemed to cause insignificant alterations to wetlands.

The activities of forestry and timber industry and their long-term impacts on the landscape do not warrant the same deference or protections that are extended to RI farmers. For the most part, RI farmers are stewards and owners of their land. Commercial entities engaged in forestry do not have the same ownership or stewardship relationship and therefore should be regulated very differently.

I strongly oppose this bill and ask you to vote against it.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jane Kenney Austin