



Conservation
Law Foundation

For a thriving New England

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Via Electronic Mail

April 10, 2024

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
Chair, House Finance Committee
Room 35, State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: CLF Supports House Bill No. 7684 – Property Subject to Taxation

Dear Chair Abney:

The Conservation Law Foundation (“CLF”) appreciates the opportunity to comment on House Bill No. 7684, which defines urban and small farmers and urban and small farmland and exempts urban and small farmers from sales taxes; real, tangible and personal property taxes; and income taxes. We offer our support for this bill.

Founded in 1966, CLF is a member-supported non-profit advocacy organization working to protect public health and the environment and build healthy communities in Rhode Island and throughout New England. CLF supports policies that grow our local food economy, support farmers, and make healthy, affordable food more accessible to all.

According to the Rhode Island Food Policy Council, more than 80 urban farms and 170 small farms were active in Rhode Island in 2023. However, urban and small farms are currently left out of many established state and federal farm support programs due to their small size. This bill would rectify that disparity.

Health professionals increasingly recognize the value of small farms and garden-scale urban agriculture for nutritional health, personal wellness, urban greening, and an engaged and active citizenry. Growing food and non-food crops in and near towns and cities contributes to healthy communities by engaging residents in work and pleasure that improves the well-being of themselves and the broader public.¹ In Rhode Island, urban farms and community gardens are critically important because they are in the heart of communities where needs are the greatest. They not only produce food but also advance community health, youth education, and environmental sustainability.

¹ Anne C. Bellows et al., *Health Benefits of Urban Agriculture: Public Health and Food Security*, Community Food Security Coalition, available at https://foodsecurity.org/UAHealthFactsheet_pdf.pdf.



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The benefits that urban and small farms create punch above their weight: helping the environment by reducing runoff associated with heavy rainfall; contributing to carbon storage and sequestration and better air quality; boosting physical and mental health by providing outdoor physical activity; and being places where diverse urban populations come together, building relationships across cultures and strengthening community cohesion.

We therefore ask that you support passage of House Bill No. 7684. Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D.A. Brown'.

Darrèll Brown
Vice President, Rhode Island
Conservation Law Foundation

cc: Members of the House Finance Committee
Representative Michelle McGaw
Representative David Morales
Representative Enrique Sanchez
Representative Arthur Handy
Representative Edith H. Ajello
Representative Rebecca Kislak
Representative José F. Batista
Representative Leonela Felix