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Molly Allard, District Manager  
On behalf of Northern RI Conservation District  
**In Support of H-7775**  
Wednesday, April 10, 2024

Northern Rhode Island Conservation District (NRICD) is in support of H-7775 and respectfully urges its passage.

NRICD is a quasi-public, not-for-profit organization that is dedicated to the conservation of natural resources in Providence County, RI. Our activities are as diverse as the county itself. Some current programs that we are especially proud of include:

- The Providence County Urban Growers Leadership Program, which enables urban growers and gardeners, most of whom grow in Providence, Pawtucket, and Central Falls, to invest time into their agricultural education. This program is offered yearly in 2-3 languages; past languages have included Spanish and Kinyarwanda, and this year the program will be offered in Spanish and Swahili.
- The Scituate Reservoir Watershed Education Program, which provides high-quality STEM education focused on watershed science to K–12 students who live in the Scituate Reservoir watershed as well as in Providence.
- Snake Den Farm, a state-owned historic farm in Johnston that we have brought back into agricultural production and is now home to six farm businesses.
- Floodplain restoration and disaster response programs in Cranston, Johnston, and East Providence. These USDA-funded programs provide property owners impacted by flooding with a 100% voluntary opportunity to sell their property at pre-disaster value and then restore the floodplain to hopefully mitigate future flooding in the area.

As District Manager it is my goal to keep our office in Johnston open as a community field office where farmers, growers, and gardeners can drop in to seek help and assistance. In recent years, our maintenance and office costs have increased. We have a staff of nine, and have made sure that our jobs pay a fair wage that encourages good talent to stay and grow in their public service careers. However, these positions are funded primarily by program-related grants, meaning that the staff can only work on the specific projects that each grant funds. Programmatic funding also cannot be used to apply for new grants or perform routine HR tasks. A change in our partners' ability to provide grant funding would eliminate these positions and interrupt the valuable services that our staff provides to Rhode Islanders.

We currently receive \$30,000 in unrestricted designated grant funding from the State of Rhode Island, for which we are grateful. However, if this resolution is passed, \$50,000 in yearly funding would enhance our ability to ensure consistent staffing in our field office, offer educational programming in areas that our current grant funding does not cover, and devote more time to bringing in federal money to Rhode Island conservation. The three conservation districts currently bring in \$89 in non-state funding for every state dollar we receive; we consider ourselves to be a pretty good bargain. This represents a \$34 increase in the funding per state dollar that we were able to leverage last year, when our state designated grant was \$15,000. We have been able to prove this year that investing in the Conservation Districts is a good return on investment for Rhode Island taxpayers.

Thank you to the Finance Committee for considering this testimony. We urge you to pass H-7775 so that the Conservation Districts can expand our role in conserving the state's important natural resources.