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Providence, RI 02903
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April 8, 2023

Honorable Chairman Marvin Abney
House Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: House Bill 7775- The RI Land Trust Council's SUPPORT of \$180,000 for the RI State Conservation Committee and the three Conservation Districts.

Dear Chairman Abney & Members of the Committee:

My name is Kate Sayles, and I am the Executive Director of the RI Land Trust Council. The Council is the coalition of the state's 50+ land trusts – community-based organizations that protect and steward Rhode Island's open spaces, farms, forestland, and natural areas for the public's benefit. We believe that all Rhode Islanders deserve an exceptional quality of life, with safe and affordable places to live that include access to open spaces. The RI Land Trust Council supports House Bill 7775, for an appropriation for the RI State Conservation Committee and the three RI Conservation Districts. They are strong partners in the work that we do, ensuring that farmers, forest landowners, land trusts, municipalities, and other private landowners have the resources they need to improve natural resources for the benefit of all Rhode Islanders.

From 2011 until 2021, I was employed as the Agriculture and Forestry Program Manager for the Northern RI Conservation District. In my role with the District, I worked directly with farmers and forest landowners to address farmland viability, soil health, water quality protection, forest stewardship and wildlife habitat management. They ensure that these landowners are connected to funding sources and direct technical assistance to make quality improvements and decisions based on science and best management practices, including collaborating on, and accessing federal and state funding for permanent conservation of critical landscapes. I have recently been appointed to serve on the State Conservation Committee, and work directly with the Districts in this role.

Rhode Island's Conservation Districts are mandated by the General Assembly to exist, but have been significantly under-resourced for two decades. We appreciate your leadership in allocating funding for the Conservation Districts in 2023, which has been used to support the payment of heating and electric bills, pay for software costs, and contribute to much needed District Manager time needed to write grants to leverage additional funding. The funding outlined in House Bill 7775 would continue that momentum by supporting each District in keeping their offices staffed, address critical needs like grant writing, fund overhead needs like paying to keep the lights on, and increase each District's capacity to increase programs that matter to their communities.

Thank you for your time and please don't hesitate to contact me with any additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kate Sayles", written in a cursive style.

Kate Sayles, Executive Director