



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 Committee on Finance
Room 35, State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: CLF **Supports** House Bill No. 7859 – Motor Vehicles Owned by a Government Body

Dear Chair Abney:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill No. 7859, a bill that would require that any government-owned vehicle that is to be replaced be replaced with a zero-emission vehicle (“ZEV”). Conservation Law Foundation (“CLF”) supports this bill as part of a larger effort to decarbonize our transportation sector.

CLF is a member-supported non-profit environmental advocacy organization working throughout New England to counter climate change, restore the health of our oceans, embolden new energy infrastructure, and safeguard health, quality of life, and economic prosperity for future generations. We have worked extensively on clean transportation issues.

Transportation causes more carbon pollution than any other source in the United States. Tailpipe pollution causes asthma and other health problems, especially in low-income communities and communities of color.¹ This is particularly true in New England, where significant progress has been made towards cleaning up pollution from our electricity generators. In Rhode Island, cars, trucks, and other equipment contributed 38 percent of the state’s emissions in 2020, more than any other source.² Clearly, any strategy to tackle greenhouse gas pollution must include a plan for reducing emissions from transportation.

¹ On average, residents of color in the northeast region are exposed to concentrations of particulate matter from vehicle emissions that are 61-75 percent higher than the exposure of white residents. While communities of color disproportionately bear the impacts of air pollution, that same pollution is predominately caused by the consumption of goods and services by white residents. As temperatures rise due to climate change, so will rates of asthma and respiratory disease in neighborhoods throughout the state as increased heat exacerbates the health impacts of air pollution. Union of Concerned Scientists, *Inequitable Exposure to Air Pollution from Vehicles in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic 2* (June 2019), available at <https://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/attach/2019/06/Inequitable-Exposure-to-Vehicle-Pollution-Northeast-Mid-Atlantic-Region.pdf>.

² R.I. Dep’t of Env’tl. Mgmt., *2020 Rhode Island Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory 3* (2023), available at <https://dem.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur861/files/2023-10/2020%20RI%20GHG%20Emissions%20Inventory%20Summary.pdf>.



A critical part of cleaning up transportation is moving to vehicles that no longer rely on gas and diesel but instead are powered by electricity—everything from our personal cars and trucks to city buses, ride-sharing services, tractor trailers, and freight and passenger trains. This bill would require the state to lead by example and replace dirty vehicles with ZEVs, while allowing for waivers in instances where a gasoline-powered vehicle cannot be replaced with a ZEV due to limited supply or inadequate replacement. H-7859 is consistent with Rhode Island’s 2022 Climate Plan Update, which recommends leading by example in electrifying state fleets.³

Purchasing ZEVs instead of dirty fossil fuel-powered vehicles will also save the state money. Although the upfront costs of some ZEVs are currently higher than comparable gas-powered vehicles, ZEVs are cheaper to fuel and maintain over their lifetime and offer owners thousands of dollars in cost savings. While most battery ZEVs will reach purchase price parity with gas-powered vehicles before 2030, they will provide drivers significant cost savings immediately, with typical six-year fuel and maintenance cost savings ranging from \$6,600 to \$11,000.⁴ Used ZEVs offer even greater savings due to lower purchase prices.

This bill represents a meaningful step towards decarbonizing Rhode Island’s transportation sector, as we currently lack enforceable targets for electrification of state fleets.⁵ We hope that Rhode Island will continue to pursue policies to make ZEVs more affordable and accessible.

It’s vital that we continue to reduce the emissions produced by our state’s transportation sector if we are to achieve the emissions reductions required under the Act on Climate and prevent the worst impacts of climate change. We therefore ask that you support H-7859, and pursue other ambitious efforts to decarbonize our state’s fleets and transportation sector in the future.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James Crowley".

James Crowley
Staff Attorney
CLF Rhode Island

cc: Members of the House Committee on Finance
Representative Michelle McGaw
Deputy Majority Leader Lauren Carson

³ R.I. Exec. Climate Change Coordinating Council, *Rhode Island 2022 Climate Update 79-85* (2022), available at <https://climatechange.ri.gov/media/1261/download?language=en>.

⁴ Peter Slowik et al., *Assessment of Light-Duty Electric Vehicle Costs and Consumer Benefits in the United States in the 2022-2035 Time Frame* 31 (2022), Int’l Council for Clean Transp., available at <https://theicct.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/ev-cost-benefits-2035-oct22.pdf>.

⁵ Governor Raimondo signed an executive order in 2015 that included modest zero-emissions vehicle purchase targets, but those targets are not enforceable and expire in 2025. See R.I. Executive Order 15-17 (Dec. 8, 2015).



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Representative Jennifer Boylan
Representative June Speakman
Representative Kathleen A. Fogarty
Representative Rebecca Kislak
Representative Katherine S. Kazarian
Representative Brandon Potter
Darrèll Brown, Vice President, CLF Rhode Island