



Testimony of the Northeastern Retail Lumber Association (NRLA) & Rhode Island Lumber & Building Materials Dealers Association (RILBMDA) on H.5305

**Submitted to the House Labor Committee
February 2025**

The Northeastern Retail Lumber Association (NRLA) represents local, family-owned businesses in the lumber and building materials (LBM) industry, along with associated manufacturers and distributors. In Rhode Island, our membership includes the **Rhode Island Lumber & Building Materials Dealers Association (RILBMDA)**, which represents over 20 member locations. The LBM industry in Rhode Island employs more than 3,000 residents, offering good-paying jobs with long-term career pathways.

Our industry is committed to worker safety and already follows comprehensive safety protocols that address temperature exposure. However, while we recognize the intent of H.5305, we believe the legislation does not fully consider existing industry safety measures, the realities of LBM warehouse operations, and the unintended economic consequences that would drive up the cost of housing.

Key Concerns with H.5305

- **There is no historical data to support additional regulation—our industry has a proven track record of safety, with zero reported heat-related injury claims in four years.**
- **Mandating climate control in LBM warehouses is impractical and wasteful, given that many of these facilities function like high-traffic drive-thrus with constant truck and forklift movement.**
- **Forcing climate control would damage lumber and increase compliance costs, ultimately raising the price of building materials and making housing less affordable in Rhode Island.**

1. Existing Industry Safety Measures Are Effective – No Historical Data Supports Additional Regulation

The LBM industry has an excellent track record of worker safety, and there is no evidence that current practices are failing.

- According to our industry’s insurance provider, which covers hundreds of locations across the Northeast, there have been zero heat-related injury claims in the past four years among insured LBM businesses.
 - This data shows that employers already take the necessary steps to protect employees, and that additional regulation would add administrative burdens without improving worker safety.
 - Many businesses already submit workplace safety plans to insurers, which are reviewed and vetted to ensure safety and loss prevention.
-

2. LBM Warehouses Function Like Drive-Thrus – Climate Control Is Impractical and Wasteful

Many LBM warehouses are not enclosed storage spaces—they function more like high-traffic drive-thrus, making climate control mandates unrealistic and inefficient.

- Many LBM warehouses are designed for continuous vehicle and personnel movement—it is not uncommon for over 100 trucks per day to move through a single facility during peak season.
 - To maintain efficiency, large industrial doors remain open throughout the day, making traditional climate control impossible.
 - Heating or cooling these open spaces would consume massive amounts of energy while failing to create a consistently controlled environment.
 - Instead of forcing rigid temperature control measures, businesses should have the flexibility to implement workplace-specific solutions.
-

3. Climate Control Would Damage Lumber, Increase Costs, and Reduce Housing Affordability

H.5305 does not consider how climate control would actively harm the very products stored in LBM warehouses, leading to waste, higher compliance costs, and increased housing prices.

- Lumber is highly sensitive to humidity levels, requiring a relative humidity of 40-60% to prevent warping, cracking, and structural degradation.
- Air conditioning removes moisture from the air, which would accelerate product deterioration and increase material waste.
- The financial burden of compliance would be severe:
 - Recently, an NRLA member spent \$200,000 to install air conditioning in 9,000 square feet of retail space.
 - Their warehouse exceeds 50,000 square feet—fully air-conditioning it would cost millions, a cost that small and family-owned businesses cannot afford.

Conclusion

By driving up compliance costs, H.5305 would increase the price of lumber and other essential building materials, directly impacting Rhode Island’s ability to provide affordable housing. Any legislation that increases the cost of materials makes it harder for families to buy homes and for builders to complete projects within budget.