

March 19, 2024

Representative Stephen M. Casey
Chair, House Committee on Municipal Government & Housing
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02908

Re: The Nature Conservancy Supports House Bill 7699 to Update the RI Housing and Conservation Trust Fund

The Nature Conservancy is grateful for the opportunity to testify in support of H7699, which would update the Rhode Island Housing and Conservation Trust Fund. We are grateful to Representatives Speakman, Carson, Morales, Cortvriend, Knight, Tanzi, McGaw, Cotter, Spears, and Handy for sponsoring it.

The Nature Conservancy is a global organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Here in Rhode Island, we steward more than 14,000 acres land and protect an additional 35,000 acres with partners. We do much of our work to protect and restore our natural environment in partnership with the Department of Environmental Management, the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank, our federal agencies, and local partner organizations.

As one of the state's largest land trusts, we recognize the critical need to protect our natural spaces. Rhode Island's forests provide resilience against climate change, clean air and water, carbon sequestration, recreation, and wildlife corridor and habitat. At the same time, the need for housing that Rhode Islanders can afford is essential. The 2023 Housing Fact Book published by HousingWorks RI reports that more than one-third of Rhode Islanders are cost burdened by housing costs, and that housing stability can lead to positive community outcomes for health, education, and economic stability.

In January 2024, The Nature Conservancy conducted polling with an independent consultant to hear from likely Rhode Island voters what they care most about.

- 71% of respondents said they were extremely or very worried about the lack of affordable housing
- 70% of respondents said that natural areas and forests were extremely or very important to their quality of life
- 83% of respondents said that Rhode Island's forests and open spaces can be protected, **and** more affordable housing can be built without having to choose

We recognize that land use in the smallest state requires thoughtful organizing and deep collaboration. House Bill 7699 would bring together key stakeholders from key interests to work towards common goals of smart land use planning. We believe that all Rhode Islanders deserve a safe, affordable place to live and access to natural spaces and clean air and water. We strongly support the updates to the RI Housing and Conservation Trust Fund that will move the state forward on both of these critical issues.

The Nature
Conservancy



Rhode Island

159 Waterman Street

Providence, Rhode Island 02906

Tel (401) 331-7110

nature.org

Fax (401) 273-4902

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angela Tuoni".

Angela Tuoni
Climate Programs Manager
The Nature Conservancy in Rhode Island