

April 2, 2025

Testimony in support of H5732: Joint Resolution—Green Amendment

George Voutes, 17 Shore Road, Bristol RI, 02809

To Chair Shanley and the honorable Members of the House State Government and Elections Committee:

I strongly support a “Green Amendment” to our state’s constitution, which would guarantee every Rhode Islander the right to a life sustaining climate and a healthier environment. This amendment aligns with our state’s core values of hope, resilience, optimism and progress. None of these values are achievable unless we have a healthy and sustainable ecosystem to live in.

Rhode Island has demonstrated leadership in addressing climate change through the 2021 Act on Climate, which mandates net-zero emissions by 2050, and the 2022 legislation requiring 100% renewable electricity by 2033. Enshrining climate and environmental rights in our constitution will provide a robust legal foundation to ensure these ambitious goals are met and maintained; safeguarding our climate and environment for future generations. As we’re experiencing with the current federal administration and congress, the dangerous disregard for our environment is a serious threat to our air, land and water. We must protect our state and this constitutional amendment is extremely important to that end.

Please review and revise the text about environmental preservation, in particular the use of the rather subjective term “scenic” in line 11 (“... and the preservation of the environment’s natural, scenic, and recreational values.”). If unchanged, the current text creates a potential conflict by unnecessarily making protecting the environment and the climate mutually exclusive, which they are not! As an example—and as in current practice—while being true to our climate goals we do address the visual impact of offshore wind farms on coastal scenery with a balanced approach that considers both the need for renewable energy and the preservation of natural landscapes (by strategic siting far away from shore these critically important renewable wind farms). This balanced approach allows for meeting our climate goals, protecting the environment and ocean from overheating and acidification, while still preserving the principal character of the landscape at the same time.

I urge you to approve this amendment, with the suggested revision, and present it to voters in the next election. Affirming our state’s ongoing commitment to combating climate change and protecting the health and well-being of all Rhode Islanders has never been more urgent and important.

Please bring the Joint Resolution to a vote in 2025.

Thank you very much for considering my input, and thank you to Representative Bennett for introducing this important bill.

George Voutes

*George Voutes*