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April 1, 2025

Chair Evan Shanley  
House State Government & Elections Committee  
State House  
Providence, RI 02903

**Re: House Bill 5732- RI Land Trust Council Supports the Green Amendment to the State Constitution**

Dear Chair Shanley & Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 5732, which would add a Green Amendment to the Rhode Island Constitution. My name is Kate Sayles, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Rhode Island Land Trust Council—the statewide coalition representing more than 50 community-based conservation land trusts that work to protect open spaces, forests, farms, historic sites, and watersheds across the state.

The Rhode Island Land Trust Council (the Council) believes that all Rhode Islanders deserve a safe, healthy, and affordable place to live, with access to clean air, clean water, healthy local food, and open space for recreation. This amendment affirms that these rights must be protected for all Rhode Islanders, regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status. By enshrining environmental rights in our state's constitution, we ensure that these protections are not subject to shifting political priorities or regulatory rollbacks.

Rhode Island's land trusts work tirelessly to conserve important open spaces, forests, open spaces, and farmlands, and these lands provide countless benefits to our residents. Forests filter and clean our drinking water, improve air quality, and store and sequester carbon to combat climate change. Protected farmland ensures farms are available for the next generation and provide us with access to local, healthy food, vital wildlife habitat, and economic stability. Moreover, the mental and physical health benefits of the outdoors are well-documented, and land trusts play a crucial role in maintaining public access to these natural spaces through our trail systems.

If passed, this amendment would place environmental rights in Rhode Island legally on par with other fundamental rights such as free speech, private property, and freedom of religion. It would provide an additional layer of protection for the conservation work we do across the state, ensuring that the health of our environment—and by extension, our communities—is not an afterthought but a legal imperative. This amendment is particularly timely given the ongoing dismantling of federal environmental protections, including the reduction in staffing at the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the deregulation of environmental safeguards through the Environmental Protection Agency. It is more important than ever that Rhode Island take the lead in protecting its own natural resources.

Enacting this amendment would ensure that future generations of Rhode Islanders have the fundamental, inherent right to clean air, clean water, healthy and uncontaminated soil, a life-supporting climate, and the preservation of our state's natural beauty. These are not privileges; they are necessities for a thriving, just, and sustainable society. For these reasons, the Rhode Island Land Trust Council urges you to support Senate Bill 327. Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Kate Sayles, Director