

Testimony in support of House Bill 5732, House Environment Committee April 3, 2025.

By O Don Hermes, Wakefield, Rhode Island

Dear Chair Bennett and Honorable Members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

April 2, 2025

Please accept this letter in strong support of House Bill 5732, known as the Green Amendment.

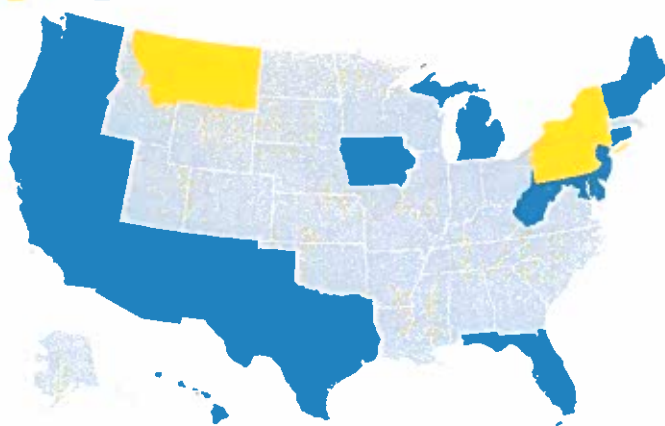
I am a Professor Emeritus in Geosciences at the University of Rhode Island. In addition, I am cochair of the Green Team at Peace Dale Congregational Church where we strive to support conservation and environmental principles to ensure a healthy and stable earth to benefit humankind.

At present the states of Montana, New York, and Pennsylvania have a green amendment in their state constitution. The amendment has proved useful in resolving environmental issues in these states, thus prompting other states to propose similar Green Amendments. An additional 19 states, plus Rhode Island, have proposed Green Amendment legislation.

#### States with approved and introduced 'green amendments'

As of 2024, 3 states – Montana, New York, and Pennsylvania – have approved green amendments. Another 19 states have introduced them.

Approved Introduced



Source: For the Generations, Sierra Club - Created with Datawrapper

The Rhode Island Green Amendment will:

- Recognize the inalienable rights of all Rhode Islanders, **including future generations**, to clean air and water, a healthy environment, a life-supporting climate, and the preservation of the state's natural resources.

- Affirm that Rhode Island's public natural resources belong to all the people and that government officials have a responsibility to conserve and maintain these resources equitably for the benefit of all, including future generations.
- Ensure these rights receive the same legal recognition and protection as other fundamental human, civil, and political rights enshrined in our state constitution.

We are very proud of our state's role in passing legislation designed to protect the environment. These are times when more is needed. A Green Amendment would ensure clean air, clean water, and a healthy environment for all of Rhode Island's citizens, now and for generations to come. The language about this affirmative right should be added to the State's Bill of Rights.

While Rhode Island's constitution presently grants the right to enjoy and exercise access to the state's fisheries and shores under Article 1, Sections 16 and 17, these provisions do not provide explicit and enforceable rights to clean air, safe drinking water, and a stable and healthy climate. The Green Amendment will bridge this gap by affirming that every Rhode Islander has a fundamental right to a clean and healthy environment—complementing and strengthening existing legal protections.

Clean water, clean air, a stable climate, and healthy environments are essential for supporting healthy human lives – in terms of physical health, mental health, cultural health and economic health. Without an environment in which human life can thrive, a person is deprived of all other rights. Given that pure water, clean air, a stable climate and healthy environments are essential for sustaining healthy human life, it is only appropriate that these rights be placed in the Bill of Rights/Declaration of Rights. With legal standing in a court of law, citizens and organizations/communities can challenge activities with potential negative environmental impacts before they occur. Without such standing, they must wait to prove harm after it has occurred.

By supporting this amendment, the legislature will be taking an important step to protect our community's health and economy from environmental degradation. **A BIG MOVE BY A SMALL STATE.** I urge you to stand with the people of Rhode Island and support the Green Amendment, thus ensuring that future generations inherit a Rhode Island that is just as beautiful and life-sustaining as it is today.

Sincerely,

O. Don Hermes