

Testimony by Peter Trafton, Providence Rhode Island in support of H5706, April 8, 2025

Dear Chair Shanley and Honorable Members of the House Committee on State Government & Elections

I write to convey my strong and grateful support of H5706 by Rep Cortvriend and colleagues. If passed and signed into law, this bill would make vitally needed modifications in Rhode Island's Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC).

Since its creation in 1972, the CRMC has attempted to manage and regulate Rhode Island's coastal resources. Again and again, it has failed to do so. In spite of a highly respected professional staff, all decisions are made by a politically appointed unpaid Council whose members are not required to have any expertise on coastal matters. Repeatedly, the Council's decisions have been overruled by our courts. They have confused the public and favored special interests. The Council is not accountable to anyone. It has not been held responsible for its bad decisions, which often ignore the recommendations of its professional staff. It is way past time for this to be corrected. This has been requested by Rhode Island Atty. Gen. Peter Neronha. H5706 responds to his request.

H5706 removes the currently established CRMC and transfers its powers and duties to a new Department of Coastal Resources. It retains the professional staff who will report to a new Department Director appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate and serving At the pleasure of the Governor. Such a new Department of Coastal Resources would function analogously to the current Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management. Federal approval (through the NOAA) of the changes described and a revised Coastal Resources Management Program ("Redbook") will be required. Once approved, the law can become effective.

Input from Rhode Island's coastal communities will be provided by a new community advisory committee, with members appointed by the governor, and expected to be knowledgeable in coastal affairs as well as residing in coastal communities. The Advisory Council would not have regulatory or administrative responsibilities.

The new Department would have its own full-time in-house legal counsel.

The most valid assessments indicate that there will be little or no additional cost from the proposed changes. Executive agencies in other New England states and the vast majority of all US coastal states are similar to the proposed new Department of Coastal Resources.

I urge you to pass H5706 instead of H5453 and other CRMC reform bills. With 400 miles of coast, the Ocean State needs a single, unique agency to best address coastal resource management.

Now is the time for Rhode Island to solve the problems of the CRMC. Please approve H5706 and advance its approval by the House, the Senate, and the Governor.

Thank you very much for considering my comments.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "PG Trafton". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Peter Trafton