

Sent via email to: HouseStateGovernmentandElections@rilegislature.gov

April 8, 2025

To: Representative Evan Shanley, Chair, House Committee on State Government & Elections

Re: SUPPORT for H5706 - AN ACT RELATING TO WATERS AND NAVIGATION -- COASTAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

I am Bill Salmons from Jamestown and a member of Protect Conanicut Coastline, a local environmental advocacy organization. I am strongly in favor of House Bill H5706, that would establish a department of coastal resources with a community advisory committee and professional legal staff. These reforms would strengthen the professional management of the state's coastal resources and fully align with the principles of good governance.

By eliminating the coastal resources management council, this reform bill removes a potential for less than knowledgeable council members ruling on increasingly complex issues impacting our core environmental resources, as well as the potential for undue influence on key decisions by partisan interests. We are all acutely aware of the corrosive influence of money on politics and governing, given the daily examples from Washington. Corporations, particularly, have the ability to marshal a great deal of money to get the results that they are looking for.

The Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) was created by the RI General Assembly in 1972 "to preserve, protect, develop, and where possible, restore the coastal resources of the state." These coastal resources of our beautiful Ocean State are for the benefit of all our citizens, but we have too often seen that private citizens are at a disadvantage when up against deep-pocketed corporate interests looking to expand marinas, build hotels, or dredge waterways. While CRMC's respected, professional staff use their expertise to review development proposals impacting our coastal resources, their findings are only recommendations to a politically appointed, volunteer Council whose members are not required to have any expertise on coastal matters, nor take responsibility for their decisions.

Problems with the Council:

- Violates its own rules and is overturned by the courts.
- Does not follow expert staff recommendations in many cases.
- Is not held accountable for bad decisions.
- Adds a layer of unnecessary bureaucracy that delays permitting decisions and increases applicant costs.

Four options for CRMC reform are outlined in the OMB Response to S3149, and HB5706 reflects OMB's Option 2. "The primary structural shift—replacing the governance council with a director-led model— aims to resolve challenges such as quorum issues and inconsistent regulatory rulings, enabling a more streamlined regulatory process." By adding a community advisory committee, this Bill addresses the need to "preserve transparency and stakeholder input", thereby meeting NOAA guidelines.

When it comes time to vote on this reform bill, I would urge each of you to support the tenets of professionalism and good governance in our state by backing House Bill 5706.

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