

To Chair Solomon and the honorable Members of the House Corporations Committee:

Testimony in support of H:5245 RELATING TO PUBLIC UTILITIES AND CARRIERS -- PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

Barbara K. Watts, 2 Locust Drive, Kingston, RI for Citizens' Climate Lobby, Rhode Island Chapter

Date of Hearing: March 20, 2025

I am representing the Rhode Island Chapter of Citizens' Climate Lobby. We are in support of passage of H:5245 because it recognizes and corrects an injustice to lower income families in Rhode Island. The creation of this program (Percentage of Income Payment Plan) would allow low-income Rhode Islanders to pay only what they can afford for their utility bills. Discounted pricing would be available to residential customers whose household income is at or below 150% of the federal poverty level.

This bill is needed because current discounts offered by RI Energy do not go far enough. According to Elizabeth Marx, director of the Pennsylvania Utility Law Project, "Both debt forgiveness and rate assistance are needed to assist people struggling with their bills. If you don't have those two components working together, you're not addressing the underlying problem, which is how households got into arrearage. "

Not only does this bill correct a serious problem for low income residents, the Percentage of Income Payment Plan can also help the customer base as a whole by reducing debt collection costs and lowering the amount of money that the utility writes off.

Please allow this important bill to come to a vote this year! It is past time to correct this problem.

Sincerely,

Barbara K. Watts, 2 Locust Drive, Kingston, RI 02881