



Caitlin Sanford  
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### **Testimony in favor of H5818**

Dear Chair Solomon, House Corporations Committee members, and Clerk Mansolillo,

My name is Caitlin Sanford, and I am writing as a Rhode Islander and a member of Climate Action Rhode Island in strong support of House Bill 5818.

In 2020 [Ohio utility FirstEnergy funneled \\$60 million, including ratepayer funds, into political efforts to secure a \\$1.3 billion bailout for its failing coal and nuclear plants](#). This scandal resulted in [criminal and civil convictions](#) and highlighted how utilities misuse ratepayer money to secure policies that harm consumers and the environment.

Entergy, a utility operating in the Southern US, admitted that [its PR firm \(an advertising cost to the utility\) paid actors to pretend they supported the construction of a gas power plant](#). Entergy was [fined \\$5 million by the City of New Orleans](#). **While Rhode Island Energy is not so egregious, we urge the legislature to act now to preempt use of ratepayer funds for lobbying, advertising, or benefits to executives.**

As documented by [policy expert Leah Stokes in her book \*Short Circuiting Policy: Interest Groups and the Battle Over Clean Energy and Climate Policy in the American States\*](#), **utility companies have repeatedly worked behind the scenes to undermine renewable energy policies while claiming to support sustainability, recovering these costs from ratepayers.** House Bill 5818 would establish critical limitations on utility spending for lobbying, ensuring that Rhode Islanders are not unknowingly financing efforts that delay the clean energy transition.

**H5818 aligns Rhode Island with best practices; Similar laws have already been enacted in Connecticut, Maine, and Colorado**, demonstrating that prohibiting these unjustified utility expenses is both feasible and effective.

House Bill 5818 is a necessary and commonsense measure to ensure that utility customers are not unknowingly funding expenses that do not serve their interests. We urge the Committee to support this bill and take this important step to protect Rhode Island consumers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Caitlin Sanford  
Co-President, Climate Action Rhode Island