

April 1, 2025

The Honorable Joseph J. Solomon, Jr.
Chairman, House Corporations Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, Rhode Island 02908

RE: H-5574 – Relating to Public Utilities & Carriers – Removal of Double Utility Poles

Dear Chairman Solomon:

On behalf of Rhode Island Energy, I write regarding H-5574, which would place new requirements on owners of double utility poles with a goal of expediting their removal. Although we **oppose** the bill as proposed, our Company appreciates the underlying goals of this bill and looks forward to working with the bill's sponsors, state regulators, and other public utilities to facilitate more timely pole removals across Rhode Island.

Rhode Island Energy provides essential energy services to more than 770,000 customers across the Ocean State through the delivery of electricity and natural gas. Our team of 1,400 union and non-union employees is dedicated to helping Rhode Island customers and communities thrive, while supporting the transition to a cleaner energy future – in a safe, reliable, and affordable manner.

As of January 2025, of the 304,000+ utility poles jointly owned by Rhode Island Energy,¹ less than one percent are double poles (\approx 2,700). Of the double poles pending service transfers, the majority involve municipal-based attachments (e.g., streetlights, public safety apparatus) or equipment associated with internet service providers (ISPs), broadband carriers, and other private entities.

Today's process for pole removals requires Rhode Island Energy to set the new pole, transfer its electric services, and notify the next attacher (often, a municipal entity) that they must similarly transfer their equipment. This process repeats itself, from the top of the existing pole to the bottom, until all attachments have been transferred to the new pole or otherwise removed. Third-party attachments (e.g., ISPs, broadband service providers) and Cox Communications services are generally placed below municipal attachments on a utility pole. The pole's joint owner and final attacher (Verizon) is responsible for removing the old pole once they have transferred their equipment.

Challenges – and delay – can occur throughout this process. For example, some municipalities may not have the resources to remove their attachments in a timely fashion or even be aware of that responsibility. Historic inventories of attachments and their location may have gaps, requiring Rhode Island Energy to conduct field visits to ascertain which equipment remains on the pole and who might own it. Also, there is the time and resources it takes for each individual attachment owner to deploy its own crew or contractor to make the equipment transfer.

¹ Approximately 89% of utility poles in Rhode Island are jointly owned between Rhode Island Energy and Verizon.

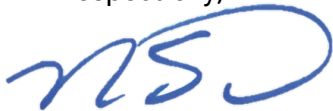
Respectfully, we offer the following:

- The definition of a public utility (page 1, lines 10-14) excludes certain telecommunication companies that, today, are joint pole owners.
- The bill proposes a 30-day window in which the removal of an existing pole, installation of a new pole, and the transfer of all wires and attachments must all be completed. Based on our experience, this is not attainable using current processes where the owner of each wire or pole attachment is responsible for their own transfer.
- Approximately one-quarter of pole replacements today involve “complex” transfers which cannot realistically be achieved in that timeframe. A complex transfer may result from the attachment of underground services, if cable splicing is required, or if a service outage must be scheduled to enable the transfer of services.
- The bill would allow the owner of a pole to impose penalties on those that are late in removing their attachments. It is unclear how Rhode Island Energy would exercise such authority, as existing Pole Attachment License Agreements do not contain penalty language and some attachments fall under the jurisdiction of the Federal Communications Committee (FCC).

Rhode Island Energy is supportive of additional dialogue to identify opportunities that may help streamline the utility pole removal process and reduce administrative barriers for all parties involved.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Respectfully,



Nicholas S. Ucci
Director of Government Affairs

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Corporations Committee