

Testimony in support of H5822: Solar Siting Advisory Task Force

George Voutes, 17 Shore Road, Bristol RI, 02809, Date of Hearing: April 1, 2025

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

Rhode Island is in serious jeopardy in meeting the greenhouse gas emissions reduction mandates of the RI Act on Climate and, to meet the goal of the Renewable Energy Standard to have 100% of our electricity from renewable energy generation by 2033. We need to accelerate our efforts statewide and H5822 is a bill that can really help in this challenge.

In order to meet both requirements, we have to drastically reduce burning fossil fuels and to step up our generation of renewable energy from offshore wind and solar. Unfortunately, the current political climate is not favorable to do either: the federal government fights science, eradicates “climate change” from all official vocabulary, opposes renewables, and has made it clear that it will not permit additional offshore wind leases—it remains uncertain if even already permitted offshore wind projects can be finished as planned. At the same time, the fossil fuel industry stepped up their misinformation campaigns and does everything possible to prolong polluting our world with their harmful products. They (along with the Trump administration) continue to discredit and slow down solar energy as a silver bullet technology (especially when paired with large scale, or decentralized/distributed battery storage and grid modernization), can compensate for at least a good number of possible losses of offshore wind capacity. RI is in a real bind, and a solar siting advisory task force will greatly help untangle us from the forces that are keeping solar from becoming more widespread in our state.

We have a choice to stem this foul tide of denial and misinformation, by doing expeditiously what is under our own control in Rhode Island, to help expanding solar energy development, not only to still reach the goals outlined in the first paragraph above, but also with the added benefit of reducing energy costs and price volatility for the rate payers. Global expansion of solar power is exploding and it’s currently the least expensive form of energy on the planet. RI can and must do better and get more solar installed in a manner that doesn’t destroy existing forests and open spaces.

H5822, if turned into law without further delay, will accelerate solar development at scale in abundantly available areas that are ill-suited for other diverse development. This will be done by implementing a task force to provide recommendations, advice and guidance to help expedite and facilitate the development of solar energy systems on eligible property owned by the state and municipalities. Implementing the task force poses a rare opportunity to accelerate and achieve leverage at a minimal financial investment. This makes so much sense and is really a pragmatic way to move solar forward in a meaningful way for RI.

Please bring the bill to a vote in 2025. Waiting any longer is counterproductive and will lead to missing not only the current window in time, but also our state goals for climate and renewables—costing RI rate payers dearly once again.

Thank you very much for considering my input, and thank you to Representative Phillips for introducing this important bill.

George Voutes

*George Voutes*