

April 1, 2025

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

RE: H-6033 – Relating to Public Utilities & Carriers – Customer Service Facilities

Dear Chairman Solomon:

On behalf of Rhode Island Energy, I write in **opposition** to H-6033, which would require public utilities to maintain physical customer service facilities within the state. **This legislation would raise costs for local utility ratepayers by necessitating investments in new physical infrastructure to provide services already available to our customers.** We respectfully request that the Committee reject this bill in its entirety.

Rhode Island Energy provides essential energy services to more than 770,000 customers across the state through the delivery of electricity or 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.

A statutory mandate to construct physical customer service facilities to provide payment and other customer services already available in the marketplace today would result in costly capital investment and on-going operating and maintenance costs. The associated rate impacts to utility consumers statewide would exceed any potential savings for the small fraction of customers that make in-person payments today.

Rhode Island Energy appreciates the concerns underlying the proposed legislation, namely, ensuring that utility customers have accessible methods to pay their bills and avenues to address other service needs. That is why **our company provides a suite of customer service resources designed to meet this charge while balancing incurred costs ultimately recovered from local ratepayers.** Existing customer service resources include:

- A full complement of experienced customer service representatives available to answer Rhode Island customer inquiries covering a wide range of topics, such as: safety and outages; account information; eligibility for discount rates; arrears management; support for customers facing financial, illness, or other hardships; and billing and payment plans;
- A Customer Advocate department that specializes in various payment assistance programs and helps identify solutions for customers who need assistance managing their energy bills;
- Multiple bill payment methods that offer optionality and convenience for our customers, *including the ability for customer to pay in cash*;
- Customer Assistance Expos and community tabling events throughout Rhode Island that provide customers with an opportunity to meet with company representatives and review payment assistance programs; and

- Support services provided by Local Community Action Program (CAP) agencies throughout Rhode Island, which serve as a valuable resource for customers looking to discuss their utility assistance needs, including access to LIHEAP, energy efficiency, and other programs.

Specific to utility bill payments, **Rhode Island Energy provides its customers with several ways to pay their energy bills – whether online, by phone, by mail, or in person.** This includes customer payments made using a checking or savings account or by a debit/credit card. Payments can be scheduled automatically (from a bank account) or by using a bank website, where offered. We also maintain pay-by phone (1-855-743-1101) and pay-by-mail options.

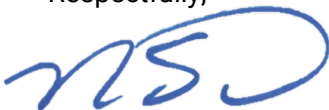
Customers can also pay their utility bills in cash. Our company maintains a relationship with Western Union providing access to ≈ 300 on-site payment locations across Rhode Island, such as local pharmacies, supermarkets, and retail stores. Like other third-party payment providers operating across the economy, there is a small (fixed) fee assessed to those accessing this service.¹ The provision of these various payment methods and services offers optionality and convenience for our customers in a manner that balances costs ultimately borne by local ratepayers.

Rhode Island Energy also holds Customer Assistance Expos, Customer Outreach “Pop-Ups,” and other community tabling events throughout the state where our customers can receive one-on-one guidance from knowledgeable customer advocates on a variety of topics. During these in-person events, our customer advocates discuss and assess which support programs a customer may qualify for, such as discounted utility rates and payment plans, and provide guidance on other available assistance. Rhode Island Energy often partners with governmental and community organizations to provide a convenient “one-stop shop” of valuable resources. Recent events have included representatives from local community action agencies (CAPs), the United Way, Family Services of Rhode Island, the Division of Public Utilities & Carriers, the Good Neighbor Energy Fund, the Department of Human Services (including LIHEAP), and the Rhode Island Food Bank. **We welcome the opportunity to work with local and state elected officials to coordinate future events in your districts.**

In closing, Rhode Island Energy appreciates the opportunity to comment on this proposed legislation and respectfully requests that the Committee reject H-6033 in its entirety.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Respectfully,



Nicholas S. Ucci
Director of Government Affairs

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Corporations Committee
The Honorable Raymond A. Hull, Rhode Island House of Representatives

¹ Please note that Rhode Island Energy does not have the ability to control fees or surcharges imposed by non-authorized bill payment centers that may operate in local communities.