



## STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

### DIVISION OF PUBLIC UTILITIES & CARRIERS

Administration  
89 Jefferson Boulevard  
Warwick, Rhode Island 02888  
(401) 941-4500

March 19, 2026

The Honorable Joseph J. Solomon, Jr.  
Chairman – House Committee on Corporations  
State House  
Providence, R.I. 02903

### Re: H 7879 – Thermal Energy Network and Job Act

Dear Chairman Solomon:

The Division of Public Utilities and Carriers (Division) is compelled to voice its earnest concerns that passage of House Bill No. 7879 may result in great financial harm to the general body of Rhode Island ratepayers, while guaranteeing cost recovery for the utility company. For the reasons summarized below, the Division opposes House Bill No. 7879.

At first glance, the bill might appear to provide a reasonable path forward to explore and advance thermal energy technology in Rhode Island. However, the “devil is in the details” insofar as the bill contains zero guardrails and zero brake-systems for what we know would be an incredibly cost-prohibitive endeavor – all on the backs of ratepayers. Although the bill is summarized as one that assembles “an advisory committee to evaluate the results” of proposed feasibility studies, the bill goes well beyond the study phase. Regardless of study results, House Bill No. 7879 prematurely provides for *mandatory* utility cost recovery for unproven *pilot* projects (as well as lead-up costs), all while allowing the utility a return on the pursuit of such project(s).

The Division has serious cost and timing concerns. Quite plainly, House Bill No. 7879 sanctions big-budget investments without true feasibility reviews or adequate cost-containment measures. Moreover, by guaranteeing ratepayer-funded advancement of thermal technology, the bill stands to undermine the notion of *Affordability* that must be considered in today’s energy and economic landscape. Ratepayers have financially supported, and continue to support, a host of nascent technologies and renewable policy initiatives that have contributed to an affordability crisis for everyday Rhode Islanders.

Relative to the nascent technology considered in House Bill No. 7879, we need look no further than 40 miles up the road in Framingham, Mass., to see how such pilot projects can go awry. The cost-recovery sought for an Eversource thermal energy pilot project there has swollen to \$24.5 million (nearly 60 percent over the original estimate of \$14 million) to service *at most* 140 participants.

To be clear, this is not to say that the underlying goal of emission reduction and climate resiliency are futile or not worthwhile. But achievement of these goals – especially when financed by ratepayers and limited ability to control the costs - must be implemented in a measured and well-timed way. House Bill No. 7879 is too much too fast. Let us first learn from our neighbors in Massachusetts about the costs and efficacy of thermal energy network projects. Let us conduct limited studies on projects of scale before we green-light cost recovery for for-profit utilities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Linda George". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Linda George, Esq.  
Administrator, RI Division of Public Utilities and Carriers

CC: Representative Cortvriend  
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel