



Via Electronic Mail

April 28, 2025

The Honorable Joseph Solomon
Chair, House Committee on Corporations
Room 101, State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: CLF **Supports** House Bill No. 7890 – Intervenor Compensation Fund

Dear Chair Solomon:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 7890 – Intervenor Compensation Fund. CLF **supports** this proposal and believes that it will encourage more participation at the Public Utilities Commission (“PUC”) and Energy Facility Siting Board (“EFSB”) and help these agencies reach decisions that are more democratic and more fair for impacted communities.

CLF is a member-supported non-profit environmental advocacy organization working throughout New England to counter climate change, restore the health of our oceans, embolden new energy infrastructure, and safeguard health, quality of life, and economic prosperity for future generations. Our attorneys actively practice in front of both the PUC and EFSB and have witnessed the need for greater participation from within impacted communities.

This legislation would reduce barriers to participation by communities that are directly impacted by utility proposals in front of the PUC and EFSB, primarily electric and gas utility proposals. Currently, when the utility seeks funding or approval for a new project or program, they open a docket at the appropriate agency. Generally, the other parties in these dockets are government agencies, such as the Division of Public Utilities and Carriers, the Office of Energy Resources, and, more recently, the Attorney General. Whether through our utility rates or through the appropriation of tax dollars, the participation of the utility and these agencies is paid for by the public.

There is an extremely important voice missing from this equation—the communities uniquely impacted by the outcome of these dockets. This could be a community organization representing the people that will now be neighbors to a new substation or pipeline. It could be low-income ratepayers who are the intended beneficiaries of a modified low-income discount rate program. It could be a community that is being asked to host a new gas or nuclear power generating facility. Across the board, these communities of Rhode Islanders are going to be affected in profound and

long-lasting ways. Yet, if they want a seat at the table to advocate for their health or property rights, or to propose an alternate program design, they must have a lawyer and technical experts. To be able to even ask to participate in the process, they have to raise private money through gifts, grants, or personal wealth, which is often not a realistic option for already marginalized communities. The cost of this work is often far beyond the resources of average working Rhode Islanders, community groups, and even most advocacy organizations.

This imbalance of power and access to resources needs to be addressed. Rhode Islanders have the right to be heard. When they are being asked to shoulder a disproportionate burden of the costs and negative impacts of our utility system, they should be supported and encouraged to engage in the process—rather than expected to serve as a sacrifice zone casualty for a collective prosperity that leaves them behind.

This program will provide grants of \$50,000 to organizations that meet the legal standard to participate in these dockets if doing so would otherwise pose a significant financial hardship. Making sure these experiences and perspectives are represented in the process is not only the correct moral and ethical approach, it also results in better decisions.

For example, the intervention of the George Wiley Center through the Center for Justice in 2024 secured winter bill credits for low-income customers—who faced health and financial risks due to spiking winter heating costs. In 2021 at the EFSB, the testimony of the People’s Port Authority, sponsored by the Attorney General since they were denied direct participation due to lack of resources to hire an attorney, was instrumental in preventing the expansion of a propane terminal and rail yard in the neighboring Providence Port posed a safety and health hazard to residents.

CLF therefore urges the passage of H-7890. Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,



Jamie Rhodes
Senior Attorney
Conservation Law Foundation

cc: Members of the House Corporations Committee
Representative Jennifer Stewart
Representative Teresa Tanzi
Representative David Morales
Darrèll Brown, Vice President, Rhode Island, Conservation Law Foundation