

Trafton testimony in behalf of the Environment Council of Rhode Island supporting H 7890 - House Committee on Corporations , April 28, 2026.

Dear Chair Solomon and Honorable Committee Members,

I'm Peter Trafton from Providence, Co-VP of Policy for the Environment Council of Rhode Island (ECRI) writing in strong support of H7890, the Equitable Participation in Utility Regulation Act, by Rep Stewart and colleagues.

Like last year, ECRI supports this bill. We remain concerned about the challenges facing lower and middle income (LMI) Rhode Islanders as they struggle to pay their utility bills. Power, heat, and light are essential needs for healthy living. They deserve equitable distribution, especially in America where wealth and ability to pay for our cost-of-living cannot be taken for granted. The Public Utilities Commission process is little-known, and little understood by the majority of Americans, and certainly here in Rhode Island. With one in three US households now struggling to pay their energy bills, it is time for us to mend our ways.

We must ensure that there are 2-way communications between the people of Rhode Island and their energy regulators. These regulators are tasked with making energy affordable, not just ensuring utility profits and free hands in choosing the most remunerative ways to run their business. Ensuring that LMIs have a seat at the table is key. But engineers, power consultants, and attorneys are costly. Providing funds for our neighbors in need is what this bill is all about. Other states have developed similar programs. We are grateful for the Acadia Center's efforts to help Rhode Island with an intervenor support program. We believe collaboration with the PUC is essential, to ensure that they are fully on board and will help the program succeed. We are quite concerned that the differences in power that exist between our utility Corporation and their customers are profound and magnified by the relative secrecy of the PUC processes. This is clearly illustrated by the findings of Brown University's Climate and Development Lab who demonstrated opposition lobbying against climate and energy legislation was primarily done by the Utility and also the PUC. (<https://pvdeye.org/climate-lobbying/>) Thus, when the PUC suggests that Rhode Island taxpayers should support the intervenor assistance program, I am grateful to read Attorney Handy's recommendation that the program might, in the interests of equity, be funded by the utility with an amount equal to what they are paying for their own lobbying.

The Environment Council of Rhode Island strongly supports your passing H 7890. It's been studied for a few years. Now it's time to get it started.

Thanks very much for considering my comments in ECRI's behalf.

Respectfully,



Peter Trafton
Co-VP for Policy
The Environment Council of Rhode Island