

My name is Peter Trafton, a resident of Providence.

I'm writing this testimony, speaking only for myself, in opposition to Bill 5294, the Old Growth Forest Protection Act, because I care about forests.

I grew up next to my grandfather's forest on the outskirts of a small city in Maine. I camped in the Maine woods, worked for the Appalachian Mountain club in the White Mountains and still share with my family a small patch of land on a mountainside in Jackson, New Hampshire. I'm 82 now and have watched and helped two generations of trees, come and grow there.

I know the forests of the West, from Southern California to Alaska. Folks there have finally begun to listen to the Native Americans and learn how they have managed forests for eons.

When I landed in Rhode Island 41 years ago I joined a club down in Exeter that had its own land trust to care for the forest we shared with local wildlife.

I'm grateful for the many folks who taught me about forests – my sister-in-law the dendroclimatologist, my mother the bird student, my brother-in-law the geographer, firefighter, and forest fire spotter, my brother and his wife who have donated priceless land to their local land trust on the coast of Maine. I guess I'm a logger - a little firewood here and there, a log cabin I helped build in the Rocky Mountains. But trees have been pretty safe around me.

Thanks for your patience with my storytelling. Though not a forest harvester, I deeply value the principles of forest management, including harvesting.

You see, the title of the bill I'm discussing is a misnomer. It is not about the very few old growth trees we have to cherish in Rhode Island. Its author is adamantly opposed to active forest management and his true goal is to end it once and for all in our state.

He misleads us about the activities of the Department of Environmental Management. Unlike all the other states in New England, Rhode Island does not lease state forests for timber harvests. The only trees that are taken from Rhode Island's state forests are part of active management – a long-standing, time-honored approach to forest care. Furthermore, only a few trees are taken for that purpose – and they are selected one by one. Although the bill author claims this is "clearcutting," he is wrong. His bill says, **"Extractive logging" means the felling or removal of any trees from a forest for any purpose**", and this is what he opposes.

May I refer you to a remarkable recently published book by Ethan Tapper – *How to Love a Forest*. Recommended by Bill McKibben, Doug Tallamy, and the National

Audubon Society, this carefully crafted text explains so much better than I the important knowledge of care for forests today. Please read it. If you don't have time right now, at least Google it and let Ethan explain through YouTube.

And please don't let your love for trees lead you astray. Bill 5294 applies only to forests owned by the state of Rhode Island, or its municipalities. (Two thirds of Rhode Island's forests are privately owned and not covered by this bill. But the bill just grabs the town forests and claims the right to manage them!) It employs a "tree czar" supervisor of all forestry activities, under the direction of the Rhode Island Division of Statewide Planning and its Statewide Planning Council – a group quite unsuited to this assignment, and uninvolved with preparation of the bill! The tree czar, and all support staff, must never have been involved with "the timber industry". The czar will bring charges of any violations of the rules of this law to a hearing presided over by the Associate Director for Planning, who is empowered to levy a civil penalty of not less than \$5,000 nor more than \$25,000. The regulations set forth in 5294 are onerous, complex, and take place over several months – perhaps delaying important actions. If I understand correctly, rules and penalties would apply to any forestry proposal from the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management. It appears that the penalties might be applied to personnel of the DEM, should the Associate Director for Planning so rule. Somehow, the processes of 5294 seem quite inappropriate for parts of our state government that should be working together on the care of our forests – not in the adversarial manner described by this bill.

I believe that there are many reasons why this bill is inappropriate as written. I'm encouraged by some of its efforts to ensure protection of Old Growth Forests, forests in general, and our natural heritage areas and preserves. I would urge that a collaborative approach by suitable portions of Rhode Island's state government be requested to propose a workable and mutually supportive program, certainly one that does not oppose active forest management.

Thank you for considering my input. I am happy to discuss further or answer questions at any time.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "PG Trafton". The letters are stylized and cursive.

Peter Trafton, MD