



Audubon Society of Rhode Island

February 27, 2025

Chairman David Bennett

House Environment and Natural Resources Committee

Rhode Island State House

Providence, RI 02903

Re: House Bill 5342 – Support for Agricultural Restricted Receipts Account at DEM

Dear Chairman Bennett and Members of the Committee,

Audubon Society of Rhode Island and our 17,000 members and supporters urge you to support H-5342, putting vital funding at the discretion of the agricultural community back into farming. Establishing a restricted receipt account for agricultural measures within the Department of Environmental Management supports stewards who ensure a healthy local food system and contribute to our economy in immeasurable ways.

Audubon often advocates for pesticide enforcement and regulation. These changes mean impacts for farmers and the farming community, and these land stewards deserve to be supported in making those changes and keeping their livelihood strong through fees collected as a matter of these efforts. Fees collected through licensing, registrations, permits, and more through the Division of Agricultural are necessary, steady, and dedicated funds.

Audubon and coalition partners advocated for additional funds for farmland conservation in the Green Bond supported by over 67% of voters last November. The amount for farming projects totaled \$5 million. The Division of Agriculture's collected fees often total \$3.5 million or more. This funding is a tremendous boost to supplementing the popular Green Bond in impactful ways and bolstering the opportunities for vital projects that may not be supported through the bond due to high level of interest and need. This bill also creates an advisory committee, providing a mechanism for ensuring the resources are spent for the advancement and sustainability of agricultural efforts in Rhode Island.

We thank Leader Chippendale for his leadership in introducing this equitable and fair legislation. Audubon Society of Rhode Island fully supports this bill.

We urge the committee to pass this bill and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Phoenix Wheeler (they/them)

Director of Advocacy

Connecting All People With Nature

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