



MAYOR BRETT P. SMILEY
CITY OF PROVIDENCE

March 11, 2025

Honorable Representative David A. Bennett, Chair
House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Rhode Island House of Representatives
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Testimony in Support of H5493, Building Decarbonization Act of 2025

Dear Chair Bennett and members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

The City of Providence thanks Representatives Kislak, Carson, Spears, Handy, Speakman, McGaw, Boylan, Fogarty, Potter, and McEntee for sponsoring House Bill 5493 and supporting decarbonization efforts in Rhode Island.

The City of Providence strongly supports the passage of H5493, entitled Relating to Health and Safety – Building Decarbonization Act of 2025. This bill would 1) establish an energy and water benchmarking program for large buildings in Rhode Island and 2) develop a subsequent standard for building emissions to enable building owners to decrease their energy use, therefore accelerating electrification and decarbonization statewide and preparing Rhode Island for a healthier and climate resilient future. Both aspects of this critical climate legislation will support economic growth and foster a healthier living environment for Rhode Islanders.

The Act On Climate requires that the state reduces emissions to 45% below 1990 levels by 2030. The building sector, which accounted for nearly 40% of RI's greenhouse gas emissions in 2022, is a critical category to target for emissions reductions and to ensure that the state meets its 2030 target. Currently, the state has no clear pathway to reduce these emissions. A building energy benchmarking requirement as described in H5493 is the most effective strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from large buildings. Energy benchmarking will empower individual building owners to make informed, data-driven strategies to reduce their building's energy use. In aggregate, this reported data will inform the building energy use standard for buildings throughout the state and ensure that the state reduces emissions to be in compliance with the Act On Climate.

City of Providence's Lead by Example Case Study

Concurrently, the City of Providence is implementing a Building Energy Reporting Program¹ that requires owners of large buildings to report their energy use to the City for public disclosure. The City then discloses that data publicly, bringing transparency to the marketplace and unlocking the economic, health, and environmental benefits of energy efficiency. Although Providence is the first municipality in the state to launch a building energy reporting

¹ <https://www.providenceri.gov/sustainability/building-energy-reporting/>

program referred to as BERO, over 30 municipalities and two states have passed benchmarking policies that require buildings to measure and report their energy use.

Providence's program is designed to drive meaningful action on climate change while providing property owners with actionable insights to save on energy costs. The "Building Energy Reporting Program" ordinance was passed by Providence City Council and approved by Mayor Smiley on November 8, 2023, recognizing it an essential cornerstone to implement the City's Climate Justice Plan and our pledge as a Climate Jobs City. Buildings account for the majority of the City's carbon emissions—roughly 79.2% based on Providence's 2021 Inventory of Citywide Greenhouse Gas Emissions². Given Providence's priority to decarbonize the building sector, we have taken active steps towards advancing electrification and phasing out fossil fuels in buildings to lead by example with our BERO program, as well as other complementary key initiatives such as the Energy Efficiency and Carbon Neutral Ordinance, which requires carbon neutrality for all city-owned buildings by 2040.

By the start of 2024, Department of Sustainability began to design the BERO program. To implement our administrative framework, the City secured grant funding to utilize two U.S. Department of Energy sponsored building energy analysis manager platforms: SEED and BEAM. Both platforms take data from ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager to 1) perform comprehensive analytics and 2) provide enhanced reporting capabilities and customer relationship management (CRM) functionality. The City contracted with ClearlyEnergy, who is the service provider for BEAM, to provide enhanced help desk support for first-time benchmarking participants. The Department of Sustainability also populated the BEAM platform with a list of covered properties consisting of 886 properties taken from data provided by the Assessors and the Planning Departments—mostly private buildings. The estimated cost of the software and services the City is currently utilizing to administer the program is \$27,489 annually, and slight increases are anticipated as the program grows. Additionally, the staffing time allocated to this program will increase over time based on what we have learned from the existing benchmarking programs outside of Rhode Island. Currently, the Department of Sustainability has allocated the equivalent of a part-time staff member to the program.

During 2024, the first year of the BERO program, the City of Providence identified and successfully reported on 64 city-owned properties³ with 10,000 or more gross square feet that were occupied in 2023 or received energy services for that entire calendar year—all publicly disclosed in our first annual Building Energy Report: Setting the Baseline for Carbon Neutrality⁴. Energy consumption data was uploaded to ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager for each of these properties to establish the City's energy use baseline. The City's energy use baseline for our public buildings is already resulting in identifying energy efficiency improvements across facilities that will result in energy usage reductions and cost savings for the City, which will serve as a strong example for private building owners.

As we move forward with reaching private building owners, the City is committed to working closely with property owners, providing tools, resources and guidance to ensure successful participation in the program and report their energy usage in May. In 2025, BERO expanded to privately owned buildings over 50,000 square feet due to report their energy usage by May 15, 2025, and by 2026, it will include all privately owned buildings greater than 20,000 square feet. The aggregated data will be disclosed by Providence this fall to inform future comparisons, enabling us to evaluate progress, inform energy efficiency policies and investments, and make tangible steps towards the City's target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

Providence is An Active Partner of the EC4, RI OER, and RI Energy

As an active partner of the EC4, including the RI Office of Energy Resources, who is committed to sharing our insights and experience to support the state in meeting its Act On Climate mandates, we are actively discussing the

² https://www.providenceri.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Providence-2021-Greenhouse-Gas-Inventory-Report_Final-DR-edits-1-PD-10.25.24.pdf

³ <https://www.providenceri.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Exhibit-A-v2.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.providenceri.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2024-BERO-Report-FINAL-1.pdf>

importance of ramping up staff time to develop a covered property list of building owners to build on overtime with appropriate contact information, design the program foundation, report and provide property disclosure information, and conduct outreach to reach building owners—which is the City’s current priority. Through partnerships, we have been able to amplify our targeted outreach efforts to create awareness about 1) the program, 2) the support available to building owners to report their energy usage, and 3) the cost saving benefits of energy efficiency tied to building to energy reporting.

Providence’s initial phased rollout approach is ensuring that property owners have the time and resources to comply effectively with the City’s support and that of its partners by providing guidance and education on reporting and energy efficiency resources available. Our launch of the program is underscoring how platforms that support comprehensive data analytics and a customer relationship management functionality for the City to adequately disclose energy use reporting citywide and equip building owners with actionable insights can be affordably funded.

Lastly, Providence continues to work closely with RI Energy to ensure that the utility energy usage data for calendar year 2024 is available to building owners, by either restoring the automatic transfer of energy usage data from RI Energy’s billing portal to ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager, which used to exist under National Grid, or by manually providing the necessary energy usage to buildings owners this Spring. Our joint efforts also include planning of co-hosting an educational webinar to ensure property owners have the support they need to complete building energy reporting and successfully access energy efficiency cost savings.

In conclusion—for the aforementioned reasons, including the important role that building energy benchmarking, electrification, and decarbonization plays in the state’s ability to meet Act On Climate mandates, and the tangible economic and environmental benefits of emissions reductions for the health of our communities, the City of Providence strongly supports the passage of H5493.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Priscilla De La Cruz

Director of Sustainability