Testimony in support of H5493: Building Decarbonization Act of 2025

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To Chair Bennett and the honorable Members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee:

So far, two bills concerning Building Decarbonization have been introduced in the House: This bill, H5493 (Building Decarbonization Act of 2025), sponsored by Representative Kislak, and H5450 (All-Electric Building Act), introduced by Representative Handy.

- H5493 introduces benchmarking to inform a building performance standard, and requires new construction, and alteration of existing buildings to be "electric-ready".
- H5450 focuses only on new construction, and alteration of existing buildings, and requires these to be "all-electric", with defined exceptions.

We know that buildings are one of the largest contributors to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in RI. We have a mandate from the RI Act on Climate to reduce GHG emissions. The resulting goals for action in the building sector should be to stop burning fossil fuels in existing buildings as soon as possible, and to no longer use fossil fuels in new construction, or alterations to existing buildings. In other words: decarbonize and rapidly move towards all-electric buildings.

The technologies for all-electric buildings are mature, available at scale, and their installation pricepoint is comparable to fossil fuel technologies, with cost coming consistently down over the last decades, a trend that is expected to continue¹. The same holds true for operating cost: by 2033 all electricity used in RI will be from clean renewable sources, and the cost of renewable electricity is also expected to come down and, over the lifetime of the building, be lower than for fossil energy¹. Still installing fossil fuel technology locks owners, tenants and tax payers into the more expensive alternative, and all will avoidably pay more going in the long-term.

Pursuing an electric-ready standard plays into the hands of the fossil fuel industry's desire to continue carbon burning as long as possible, and is contrary to the intent of the RI Act On Climate.

To plan for electric-ready, the builder needs to have worked out a fairly refined plan for a future conversion to all-electric, otherwise it would be impossible to know the capacity to provide for a future retrofit, including sufficient space, drainage, electrical conductors or raceways, bus bar capacity, and overcurrent protective devices for such retrofit. In other words, with planning for electric-ready, the builder would be in the position to forgo fossil installations and implement the better all-electric plan right away.

Once the investment into infrastructure like a gas or oil furnace has been made, the owner is unlikely to invest again soon (i.e. in the next one or two decades) and be locked in and not motivated to convert to all-electric. Consequently, any electric-ready standard will unnecessarily extend carbon emissions from the building sector, which contradicts our GHG reduction mandates.

¹ Kingsmill Bond et al.: The Cleantech Revolution—It's exponential, disruptive, and now. Report, RMI (2024): <u>https://rmi.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2024/06/RMI_cleantech_revolution.pdf</u>

With this in mind, I would like to suggest to revise the requirement for new construction and alterations to all-electric, instead of electric-ready, and

- either limit the scope of H5493 to benchmarking and the building performance standard, and concurrently implement H5450,
- or to merge both bills into a single bill requiring the benchmarking, the building performance standard, and all-electric construction for new construction and alteration of existing buildings, with defined exceptions.

The resulting bill would be setting all-electric as standard, and would still allow for mixed fuel use and electric-ready construction, if all-electric is not feasible, as described in section 23-27.3-130.4. of H5493, or section 37-27-3. (b) of H5450.

I would wholeheartedly support either of these two alternatives, because they provide the best path to the urgently needed reduction of building GHG emissions in Rhode Island.

Thank you very much for considering my input, and thank you to Representative Kislak for introducing this important bill (and to Representative Handy for introducing H5450).

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