

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

CC: Representative Jason Knight & Representative Michelle McGaw

FROM: Cindy Larson Moura

RE: Written Testimony in Support of H7074

DATE: January 22, 2026

Chair Bennett and Members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

Thank you for your service and your commitment to Rhode Island's natural resources. My name is Cindy Larson Moura. I am a Barrington resident, a member of the Board of the Barrington Land Conservation Trust, and the co-owner of Prickly Ed's Cactus Patch Native Plant Emporium – a Rhode Island Small Business. I am writing to express my strong support for H7074, which authorizes and empowers the Rhode Island Department of Transportation to plant trees, shrubs, and otherwise beautify areas within the limits of roads and state highways, with a particular emphasis on pollinator-friendly native species where appropriate. This legislation is a forward-thinking approach that not only enhances the visual appeal of our transportation corridors but also provides critical habitat for pollinators, which are essential to the health of our local ecosystems and agriculture.

By including native and pollinator-friendly plantings, the Department will help support declining pollinator populations such as bees and butterflies, which play a vital role in pollinating crops and wild plants. The collaboration with apiarists, horticulturists, and other certified professionals to identify appropriate species and locations ensures that these efforts will yield the greatest ecological benefit while fitting harmoniously into the existing landscape.

Additionally, funding these plantings through existing highway appropriations—without impacting construction, reconstruction, or maintenance budgets—demonstrates fiscal responsibility and a commitment to enhancing our state's natural resources. Notably, increasing the amount of trees, shrubs, and native vegetation along our roadsides can also lead to significant reductions in the need for regular mowing, resulting in measurable cost savings over time. By minimizing the frequency and scale of mowing, Rhode Island may also lessen equipment and labor expenses, as well as reduce fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions associated with maintenance activities. Furthermore, establishing diverse and resilient plant communities can decrease the reliance on herbicides for weed management, thereby reducing chemical inputs along our roadways and supporting healthier environments for both people and wildlife.

It is important to note that this approach has become a common and successful practice in many states nationwide. For example, the state of Vermont, seen as a leader in protections for pollinators, has implemented pollinator-friendly roadside plantings along its highway system, embracing native wildflowers and grasses to support biodiversity. Similarly, Massachusetts is now engaging in the management of over 824 acres of land along state roadways to become safe havens for pollinators while also significantly reducing maintenance costs and herbicide application. Maine DOT actually produced a guide for roadside native plant habitat restoration. And in 2025, Connecticut DOT proudly reported that it had successfully grown its roadside pollinator habitat to more than 250 acres and is eager to do more.

Rhode Island has the opportunity to join its New England neighbors and follow these proven models, reaping both ecological and economic benefits. Indeed, managing roadways in this fashion is expected, not extraordinary in many places. The US Department of Transportation has guides and resources encouraging this practice and has in year's past even offered grant dollars to support states in moving forward with these important strategies. There are extensive resources available from well respected organizations such as the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Research, the Pollinator Partnership, and the Rights of Way Working Group to help guide the implementation of this project in Rhode Island. Let's put aside the narrative that this would be a burden and embrace it as the opportunity that it is.

This initiative will not only beautify our roadways but also contribute to cleaner air, reduced stormwater runoff, increased biodiversity, and a more sustainable use of public funds. As you are well aware, this bill has been before your Committee on numerous prior occasions. Each year that it gets delayed, also delays progress towards more progressive management of our roadsides. It is time to do better.

I respectfully urge the Committee to advance H7074 to the House floor with a recommendation for passage. This bill represents an investment in Rhode Island's environmental health, the well-being of its residents, and the sustainability of its agricultural and natural heritage.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Cindy Larson Moura, Barrington, RI