TO: Chair Bennett and members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
CC: Rep. Boylan
FROM: Chelsea Blanchette
RE: Support for H7736
DATE: February 25, 2026

Hello Chair Bennett and honorable members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee:

My name is Chelsea Blanchette and I live in Newport, Rhode Island.

I am writing to urge you to support H7736 (Boylan), which would prohibit the use of artificial turf as material to cover compacted solid waste at a sanitary landfill; establish a landfill plant cover pilot program to determine feasibility and benefits of using a native grass mix as landfill cover; and require Rhode Island Resource Recovery to develop a system for tracking and reporting on artificial turf disposal volume and weight.

It is the responsibility of the state to protect and promote biodiversity and ecosystem health through responsible land management in Rhode Island. Landfill sites have the potential to add value to Rhode Island's ecosystem services, rather than detract from the already encroached upon natural resources across the state. By prohibiting the use of artificial turf in these areas and instead requiring a native seed mix to be planted, landfill sites will become an example of responsible land management and promote the use of environmentally friendly infrastructure for future development and management projects statewide.

Strong, healthy ecosystems contribute to essential ecosystem services such as storm water mitigation, water filtration, climate cooling, increased biodiversity and overall community resiliency. While the state works to improve these ecosystem services through infrastructure such as more accurate storm prediction technology, complex drainage networks, increased storm water management, and the creation of city green spaces and tree projects, landfill sites offer a pre-established, minimal investment opportunity that should be utilized for environmentally beneficial land management. Native seed planting is a low input solution that will become self-sustaining shortly after introduction, requiring minimal management once established, allowing essential environmental funds and resources to be allocated elsewhere. As our Rhode Island communities continue to face increasing environmental threats including sea level rise, storm flooding, temperature increases and invasive species invasions, every step we take to reduce these threats is essential.

Negative environmental impacts imposed by artificial turfgrass include microplastic and PFAS pollution (known as forever chemicals), lack of storm water permeability, which leads to increased flooding and erosion, and dead zones for beneficial flora and fauna, which diminishes biodiversity, habitat connectivity, and overall ecosystem health. Additional artificial turf grass is responsible for high emissions during the creation of the material and increased surface temperature after installation (Cumberbatch, 2025). Storm water drainage near artificial turf requires increased maintenance and cleaning due to the high levels of runoff, an untimely and expensive hidden cost of using artificial turf (Cumberbatch, 2025). In order to best protect our valuable waterways and bolster climate resiliency against rising temperatures and storm intensity, it is essential that Rhode Island eliminate the unnecessary use of artificial turf in areas that will benefit from native ecosystem rehabilitation, specifically landfill sites that have the potential to easily promote rather than detract from essential ecosystem services. **Bill H7736 will improve Rhode Island's preparedness against increasing climate concerns and alleviate stress on already high**

demand flooding and drainage areas.

Native species rich grasslands are the easiest way to provide ground cover quickly in a disturbed area (Simmons, 1999). The selection of native, drought tolerant and full sun tolerant grass species is vital to the success of the planting phase. It must be stressed the importance of planting native species that will thrive in such disturbed soil conditions. Planting native species over non-native species in urban areas has been seen to dramatically increase faunal abundance (overall biodiversity) due to native species' inherent adaptation to preexisting climatic conditions and ability to recreate the region's natural habitat (Tartaglia, 2024). The species highlighted in Figure 1 will thrive in these highly disturbed and exposed soils and once established, will require little maintenance and water. Through natural progression, these recommended plant species will become a natural, self-sustaining ecosystem over time (Simmons, 1999). In addition to drought and sun tolerance, these species have been selected for their height and root depth. Due to their lower profile, roots will not penetrate too deeply into the landfill, eliminating concern over contacting landfill debris. To promote maximum strength and resiliency in the disturbed area, sun and drought tolerant species have been prioritized to minimize external climatic factors that could hinder successful propagation. From the species provided in Figure 1, a suitable grass seed mix can be established by working with a local seed company.

By increasing natural green space in areas once devoid of human interaction outside of waste dumping, landfill sites can be revitalized and transformed into recreation sites for the community. Not only will native grass habitats provide ecosystem services that promote biodiversity and climate resiliency, they will also provide community services that will enhance the livelihoods of the neighborhoods nearby. A visually appealing landscape design is an added benefit to rehabilitating these areas, and in addition to a more attractive site, public perception of landfills is positively influenced through native habitat restoration (Simmons, 1999). Public concern over access to green space and protection of local, native biodiversity is only increasing, and it is the responsibility of the Rhode Island legislature to prioritize these community concerns (Simmons, 1999). After the initial establishment phase, these sites can be transformed into nature paths for recreation including dog walking or disc golf. A successful example of landfill site rehabilitation can be seen at Jeff Blatnick Park in Niskayuna, New York, where the town expanded their 9 hole disc golf course to include the recently capped nearby landfill, adding an additional 9 holes with walking paths and interactive sporting activities (Gold, 2017). Successfully incorporating recreation into the final stage of landfill projects through interactive native habitat restoration will benefit the overall perception of landfill sites and provide communities with increased outdoor health benefits (Simmons, 1999).

The benefits of bill H7736 are indisputable. Major focal points of Rhode Island's environmental infrastructure including storm water runoff, drainage, and mitigation will benefit from natural habitat restoration on landfill sites. Local air quality and surface temperature will improve due to the natural ecosystem services plants provide. Habitat for beneficial insects and animals will increase, contributing to an increase in biodiversity and resiliency, and communities will benefit from added visual and recreational appeal to their neighborhoods. By continuing to allow the installation of artificial turf grass in these areas, Rhode Island communities are being denied these benefits and will continue to pay the costs in climate related damages.

Please pass this bill out of committee and to the House floor with a recommendation for passage.

Sincerely,
Chelsea Blanchette
Newport, RI 02840

Figure 1: Planting Recommendations in place of Artificial Turf for Landfill Sites in Rhode Island

Rhode Island Landfill Plant List Recommendations - last updated Feb 11, 2026

Latin Name	Common Name	Type	FS	ST	DT	WT	Mature Height	Width	BirdH	PollH	Recommendations	RI Natural Plant Community
Eragrostis spectabilis	Purple Lovegrass	Grass	x		x		8-14"	10-16"		x	Plant in higher concentration, easier to source	*Maritime Grassland*
Schizachyrium scoparium	Little Bluestem	Grass	x		x		12-48"	8-24"	x	x	Plant in higher concentration, easier to source	*Maritime Grassland*
Juncus greenei	Greene's Rush	Grass	x		x	x	12-36"	12-24"				*Maritime Grassland*
Deschampsia flexuosa	Wavy Hairgrass	Grass		x	x		24-36"	12-24"			Plant in higher concentration, easier to source	*Red Cedar Rocky Summit Habitat*
Danthonia spicata	Poverty Grass	Grass	x		x		12-24"	12-18"		x		*Red Cedar Rocky Summit Habitat*
Ammophila breviligulata	American Beach Grass	Grass	x		x		18-36"	colonizes				*Beach Grass Dune Association*
Dichanthelium clandestinum	Deer-Tongued Rosette-Panic Grass	Grass	x		x		24-36"	colonizes	x			
Sporobolus cryptandrus	Sand Dropseed	Grass	x		x		12-36"	4-12"				

NOTES

> This species list was derived from the RI Native Plant Guide and Vascular Flora of Rhode Island, with all taxa verified as native to Rhode Island and cross-checked against Natural Plant Communities of Rhode Island.

> *Eragrostis spectabilis*, *Schizachyrium scoparium*, and *Juncus greenei* are Maritime Grassland associates and should be co-planted to maximize habitat function. *Deschampsia flexuosa* and *Danthonia spicata* are characteristic of the Red Cedar Rocky Summit community and are best installed together. *Ammophila breviligulata*, *Dichanthelium clandestinum*, and *Sporobolus spp.* are suitable for disturbed or landfill substrates but are not components of Maritime Grassland or Red Cedar Rocky Summit systems.

KEY

FS = Full Sun

ST = Shade Tolerant

DT = Drought Tolerant

WT = Wind Tolerant

BirdH = Bird Habitat

PollH = Polinator Habitat

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