

SUBJECT: **Support for House Bill No. 7183** (Building Benchmarking and Reporting Act)

FROM: Bill Ibelle, co-chair CARI Politics Team
28 Memorial Rd. Providence, 02906

Dear Chair Bennett and Members of the Committee,

Building benchmarking is **not expensive**, and it's **ready to go**. Coupled with building performance standards, it will improve the environment, save ratepayers money, create jobs, and cut energy costs for building owners.

Those are some pretty bold claims. Let me support them one by one:

*** Affordable**

Providence is home to 40% of the large buildings in Rhode Island. Yet all the city needed to create AND operate its benchmarking program for the last two years is a half-time staffer and a \$100,000 budget for software.

*** Ready to go**

Providence has already done much of the up-front work. It has a) designed and implemented the program, b) tested and operated the program and run it smoothly for two years, c) completed the negotiations needed to bring RI Energy on board. As a result, the program is largely plug-and-play for the state and other municipalities. The EPA's Energy Star Portfolio Manager program is available to any community that wants to automate the process and feed information between the city, building owners, and RI Energy.

*** Big environment impact**

More than a third of carbon emissions in Rhode Island come from the building sector. The decarbonization program was identified in the EC4 Climate Strategy as one of the most effective ways for the state to reduce emissions and meet its climate goals. Not only will the program reduce energy use, it will also provide us with the information needed to make an informed transition from fossil fuels to clean energy.

*** Saves money for building owners**

The most affordable energy is the energy you don't have to buy. By creating detailed energy use reports, the program provides owners of large buildings with the information needed to make efficiency upgrades that will save them money for years to come. RI's Climate Action plan states that building decarbonization "can mitigate energy consumption, reduce utility bills, and manage peak electricity demand and system costs."

*** Maintains owner control**

Rather than mandate specific actions, the programs allow owners to choose between a variety of efficiency methods, including weatherization, heat pumps, solar panels and more.

*** Saves money for ratepayers**

The primary cause of soaring electric rates is our over-reliance on natural gas. Prices for natural gas are spiking while the price of clean energy has been declining for more than a decade. The war in Iran has supercharged the rise in gas prices, making this situation even more lopsided. Yet Rhode Island relies on natural gas for 87% of its energy production. This is just plain foolish and the building decarbonization program will help solve this costly imbalance.

Creates jobs

It's important to note that 100% of Rhode Island's natural gas is imported. That means that all of the \$3 billion we spend each year on natural gas, flows out of state to fuel the economy of Texas, Pennsylvania, and Canada. Clean energy is local energy—the money stays in the Rhode Island economy. Energy efficiency programs create local jobs installing heat pumps and solar panels or weatherizing buildings. The building decarbonization program will be a motor to drive in-state employment.

No cost to homeowners or small businesses

It's also important what this bill doesn't do: It doesn't cost homeowners or small businesses a penny because it only applies to the state's largest buildings.

Improves public health

Heating with fossil fuels doesn't just pollute the atmosphere, it also releases harmful gases into the buildings themselves. This is a significant concern in public schools. Asthma rates are rising in Rhode Island and are above the national average. Worse yet, emergency room visits by children with asthma have spiked dramatically.

**The question is: What are we waiting for?
It's time to stop talking about it, and start doing it.**

Thank you for your consideration,

Bill Ibelle, co-chair of CARI political team
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