

March 11, 2026

Subject: In Favor of H-7183 Building Benchmarking and Reporting Act of 2026

Dear House Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

Last year, I wrote and testified for the first time in my life in support of Building Decarbonization Act of 2025, which was also supported by numerous major environmental groups in the state. Unfortunately, this bill never came to a full vote. As a Rhode Islander, member of Climate Action Rhode Island (CARI), and Architectural Green Building Consultant, I was disappointed on all three accounts.

We can't reduce energy consumption if we don't know how it is being used. This benchmarking program would track energy use in the state's largest buildings and thereby provide owners with the information they need to make their properties more efficient and cost effective.

Despite numerous complaints last year that we don't have enough data to make recommendations to improve buildings, the Rhode Island legislature did not pass the very bill that would allow for information to be gathered. Since then, buildings have been built, emissions have increased, and climate change has continued to worsen. Providence itself has successfully gathered building benchmarking data. What is stopping this act from moving forward?

Some of the hesitation to the previous bill was in regards to the performance improvement aspect. This aspect of the bill has been extracted to become a separate discussion altogether.

Other arguments against benchmarking are that it costs money to implement. Yes, there is an initial investment. However, for every \$1 spent in the local economy, energy efficiency generates 57¢- 84¢ more economic activity than does payment of energy bills (see the EPA's https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2016-03/documents/table_rules_of_thumb.pdf). If the concern is the Rhode Island economy, we should be putting the money where it will be most effective at helping Rhode Islanders.

Consumers know how much recent spikes in oil and gas prices affect their daily lives. If we want to reduce day-to-day costs for Rhode Islanders, we need to have knowledge of financials within our control, and that includes costs spent on single-use fossil fuel energy sources that power our buildings. If we don't have data, how can we take control of our futures?

Thank you for your consideration,
Emily Totten