



March 25, 2026

The Honorable David A. Bennett, Chair  
House Environment and Natural Resources Committee  
Rhode Island House of Representatives  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

RE: HOUSE BILL 7081 – AN ACT RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- NEXT GENERATION PUBLIC BUILDINGS ACT

Chair Bennett and Honorable Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, we write to express our concerns regarding House Bill 7081, the “Next Generation Public Buildings Act.” The League appreciates the intent of this legislation and shares the General Assembly’s commitment to reducing emissions, improving energy efficiency, and advancing the goals of the Act on Climate. Rhode Island’s municipalities are on the front lines of implementing climate initiatives, and many communities have already taken meaningful steps to modernize facilities, improve energy performance, and transition toward cleaner technologies.

While we support the overarching goals of the bill, we are concerned about the impact this legislation would have on our cities and towns. House Bill 7081 presents a significant unfunded mandate. The prohibition on combustion-based heating systems for air and water heating in new construction and major renovations would increase upfront capital costs for municipal projects, including schools, public safety buildings, and other public facilities. Electrification technologies continue to improve, but the cost differential, particularly for large or complex buildings, remains substantial. Without a dedicated and reliable state funding source, these requirements would place additional strain on already limited municipal budgets and, ultimately, local taxpayers.

The bill’s applicability to renovations exceeding fifty percent of a building’s value also raises practical concerns. Municipalities frequently undertake phased upgrades to aging infrastructure, and this threshold could unintentionally trigger full compliance requirements when a community is simply trying to maintain or modestly improve an existing facility. This may discourage incremental investment and delay needed improvements.

There are also concerns related to feasibility and infrastructure readiness. Not all communities currently have the electrical capacity or grid reliability necessary to support fully electric public buildings, particularly for facilities with high energy demands. While we appreciate the inclusion of a hardship waiver provision, municipalities would benefit from clearer standards, streamlined processes, and assurances that such waivers will be administered consistently and efficiently. Without this clarity, municipalities may face uncertainty during project planning and execution. The League respectfully urges consideration of amendments that would provide dedicated state funding or incentives, reevaluate the renovation threshold to avoid unintended consequences, ensure a clear and predictable waiver process, and allow for flexibility in meeting emissions reduction goals while accounting for local conditions.

The League remains committed to working collaboratively with the bill sponsor and members of the General Assembly to achieve shared climate goals in a manner that is both effective and fiscally sustainable for Rhode Island's municipalities.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R.R. Rossi', written in a cursive style.

Randy R. Rossi  
Executive Director

Cc: Honorable Members of House Environment and Natural Resources Committee