DATE: May 19, 2026

FROM: Kevin O'Neill

TO: House Environment and Natural Resources Committee

SUBJECT: Testimony supporting H7183

Dear Chair Bennett and Members of the Committee,

Like Dr. Caroly Shumway, I am a resident of Cumberland, RI. She comes from a long line of scientists, and her letter to you regarding this bill does an excellent job of explaining the scientific reasons to support it. I am an engineer, as were my father and grandfather, so I would like to emphasize the practical, economic, and quality of life reasons to support the bill, reasons not explicitly addressed in the bill but essential to understanding why it should be supported by all Rhode Islanders.

The buildings in which we live and work are our biggest and longest lasting physical investments. The costs of operating those buildings are important line items in annual budgets. Poorly designed or constructed buildings typically have higher operating costs and deliver inferior comfort. Benchmarking the energy use of the buildings in our state is a relatively simple way to identify those buildings that have room to improve.

Reporting those measurements will bring improvement opportunities to the attention of building owners and will be helpful to potential buyers or inheritors of those buildings in the future. We are social creatures, and when deciding where to invest scarce time or money, one of the important cues we follow is how our performance compares to our peers. Just as competition drives athletes to improve, building owners and operators will feel pressure to improve through the simple act of sharing information about the energy use intensity of their properties.

Lower energy use intensity generally means lower annual energy cost per square foot. Lower source energy use intensity generally means a smaller burden on shared infrastructure – like a gas pipeline. Most people know that the price of natural gas in New England is higher in winter than in summer because of constrained pipeline capacity and because of competition between space heating and electricity generation. By focusing attention on energy use intensity, owners and operators of large buildings will be motivated to reduce their direct consumption of gas and electricity, thus affecting the market that sets the price of gas and electricity. Benchmarking source energy use intensity will motivate owners to think about putting solar panels on their buildings, thus reducing the amount of electricity generation required from the wholesale electricity market and thereby reducing the amount of gas that needs to squeeze through that pipeline to electricity generators.

I have worked or spent time in large buildings with inefficient or poorly designed heating and cooling systems, and felt uncomfortably cold or hot at different times of the year. Rooms child below comfortable temperatures, occupants cracking open a window in winter, and workers jockeying for desks farther away from drafty or poorly insulated windows are common symptoms of a building with excessive energy use intensity. Benchmarking will make it more obvious to owners and others where building improvements need to be made that will reduce EUI and improve comfort.

As the City of Providence has shown, energy benchmarking of large buildings is practical and painless. Please support the expansion of that practice statewide. I believe this bill offers a good approach.