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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
Subcommittee on Environment and Transportation

**Testimony on the Coastal Resources Management Council FY25 Budget  
April 2, 2024**

Thank you, members of the Subcommittee on Environment and Transportation, for considering Save The Bay's testimony on the Governor's FY25 budget for the Coastal Resources Management Council.

The Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) is charged with protecting and managing our coastal resources and designating and enforcing public rights-of-way. RI voters repeatedly, and overwhelmingly, support efforts to restore and protect the Ocean State's environment, including our most important asset: Narragansett Bay. It is time to add resources to this chronically underfunded agency as it faces new and increasingly complex challenges. While the Governor proposes much-needed additional staff for the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) once again this year, his budget contains no additional positions for CRMC. The status quo is unacceptable, especially given that the staff at CRMC are on the front line of climate change. We cannot continue to starve the agency of resources it needs to meet the current and increasing demands of wind energy proposals, developments in the coastal zone, shoreline access, erosion, etc.

Article I, Section 17 of the Rhode Island Constitution states,..."it shall be the duty of the general assembly to provide for the conservation of the air, land, water, plant, animal, mineral and other natural resources of the state, and to adopt all means necessary and proper by law to protect the natural environment of the people of the state by providing adequate resource planning for the control and regulation of the use of the natural resources of the state and for the preservation, regeneration and restoration of the natural environment of the state.

With a meager staff of thirty-two full time equivalent positions, CRMC is responsible for permitting and enforcement over 420 miles of the Rhode Island Coast. Additional resources are needed. The status quo is unacceptable.

**Critical Need for Two Coastal Policy Analysts.** Coastal policy analysts serve as the Coastal Zone Management Act Federal consistency specialists. They assist in the agency's review of offshore wind, and in navigating a myriad of federal programs. Coastal policy analysts perform technical review and analysis of environmental program data and issues as they relate to the implementation of the coastal program. They conduct research, collect and analyze data, develop recommendations for courses of action and assist in the development of new policies, regulations, plans, legislation and project management. They also prepare publications and coordinate federal grants and with state and federal agencies. Coastal policy analysts perform core agency work and there are only three analysts in the proposed budget.

**Full Time Attorney.** CRMC lacks a full- time attorney dedicated exclusively to representing the staff and Executive Director. The Executive Director/staff and Council are currently represented by the same attorneys, who simultaneously engage in private practice. This creates a conflict of interest, with a significant risk that the

representation of staff is materially limited by the lawyer's responsibility to the Council. Like DEM, The Executive Director/staff should have independent representation at hearings. Unfortunately, the lack of a staff was highlighted by the recent Champlin's Marina debacle, in which the Council, with its attorney, tried to overturn its repeated denial of a permit to expand the marina through "mediation" with the applicant behind closed doors.

The budgeted amount allocated for legal services to the private law firm that represents both the Council and the staff is \$194,000. It is unclear whether additional contract or federal funds are allocated in other sections of the budget. Under the current structure there should be at least one full-time attorney for the Executive Director/staff and a part-time attorney to assist the Council at hearings. The cost of this should be minimal. For comparative purposes, the cost for the Assistant Director and Chief of Legal Services for DEM is \$146,500.00 plus benefits.

**Structural Reform and the Budget:** The structure of CRMC must be reformed to foster accountability, predictability and transparency by eliminating the unnecessary and highly politicized layer of bureaucracy that is the Council. However, with or without this reform, the most urgent need is for the Executive Director/staff to have at least one lawyer and additional policy analysts. The routine business of this agency also requires an additional engineer (with only 3 of varying levels of training on staff).

Save The Bay respectfully urges the Senate Finance Committee to support a budget that reflects the importance of Rhode Island's coastal agency, and puts the agency in a position to be more efficient, transparent and consistent in its decision-making.

Respectfully,



**Topher Hamblett**  
**Executive Director**