

Testimony in support of H7495: 2025 BATTERY-POWERED LEAF BLOWER PILOT REBATE AND EDUCATION PROGRAM

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Date of Hearing: May 2, 2024

To Chair Abney and the honorable members of the House Finance Committee:

I support H7495 and its appropriation of \$350,000 to establish a pilot battery-powered leaf blower rebate and education program to reduce air and noise pollution by helping commercial landscapers adopt zero-emission leaf blowers benefiting the health of landscape workers, surrounding communities and the state of Rhode Island.

H7495 is a practical and measured step forward towards helping Rhode Island become a healthier, cleaner and quieter state. This bill was created to help small business landscaper owners and their workers undertake the use of modern, clean, and efficient battery-powered leaf blowers. The bill also makes a concerted effort to educate willing landscapers in best practices for achieving success using battery-powered leaf blowers. As landscapers succeed with battery-powered leaf blowers, residential home and property owners will have a new population of battery-powered leaf blower landscapers to turn to for healthier, cleaner and quieter landscape maintenance. Commercial landscaping in Rhode Island today runs entirely on fossil fuel equipment, with the (archaic 2-cycle engine) gas-powered leaf blower being the most dangerous machine type to the health and well-being of humans and the environment across Rhode Island. Battery powered leaf blowers are used commercially across the country and in neighboring states, but are not used commercial in Rhode Island today. This fact needs to change and soon.

Please bring H7495 to a vote in 2024.

Additional points to consider in favor of H7495:

- H7495 will start getting battery-powered leaf blowers into the field with landscapers and their and available to landscape contractor customers who desire this technology.
- Commercial landscaping customers want their properties maintained, but also want it done with less noise and pollution.
- H7495 once enacted, is a completely voluntary program for landscapers. It does not force landscapers to stop using gas-powered leaf blowers or require them to apply for rebates or participate in any education.
- H7495 will provide commercial landscapers a financial head-start - helping defray the capital expense of purchasing a new battery-powered leaf blower and related batteries.
  - The current retail (non-sales) price of a commercial quality battery-powered backpack leaf blower kit (as of March 2024) at Ace Hardware in Bristol RI is \$699. This EGO commercial kit model LBPX8004-2 comes with (1) commercial 800 CFM (very strong) backpack blower, (2) 6.0Amp Hour batteries, and (1) dual port charger.
  - The current retail price (non-sales price) of a commercial quality battery-powered handheld leaf blower (as of April 2024) at ACE Hardware stores across Rhode Island is \$229. This EGO commercial kit includes (1) handheld blowers with 670 CFM, (1) 4Amp Hour battery, and (1) charger. *Note: CFM is Cubic Feet per Minute (the volume of air produced by the blower).*
- H7495 will help grow the Rhode Island economy for retailers selling battery-powered leaf blowers.
- H7495 will provide additional tax revenue to the state of Rhode Island.
- H7495 will help drive innovation into a sector of industry (commercial landscaping) sorely in need of transformation.
- Battery-powered leaf blowers are extremely powerful and more than capable for commercial usage today. There are numerous examples of commercial landscapers (outside RI) who are successfully running their businesses today using battery-powered leaf blowers. Also, their businesses are thriving as more and more customers seek commercial landscapers who offer battery-power leaf blowing operations.

- Battery-powered leaf blower batteries are strong and efficient to last a full day of work. There are numerous examples of commercial landscapers (outside RI) successfully running their businesses today using battery-powered leaf blowers without having to charge batteries in the field during the day.
- Battery-powered leaf blower batteries are safe and can be recycled at home stores such as Lowes, Home Depot and other outlets.
- H7495 will help Rhode Island meet the mandates required by the Act on Climate.
- Gas-powered leaf blowers are a significant contributor to increasing pollution in our towns, cities and throughout the state of Rhode Island.
- Gas-powered blowers are not necessary during the mid-spring, thru summer, and for most of the autumn months. During these months, there are no leaves on the ground in Rhode Island. Blowing some dirt and a few grass clippings around during these months using gas-powered leaf blowers is very outdated, unnecessary, aggressive, and particularly harmful to humans and animals who spend more time outdoors during these months.
- Commercial landscapers use gas-powered leaf blowers because it's best for them. "Getting the most lawns done in a day is what it's all about in the industry. And if loud noise and high pollution are by-products of the gas-powered leaf blowers they use, then that's just too bad for everyone and people need to get over it." This is the answer I get most when I ask landscapers to consider using battery powered leaf blowers. Rhode Island citizens demand more choices on the type of leaf blower technology commercial landscapers use to maintain residential and commercial properties.

Personal stories that reinforce my support for H7495:

- I moved from my home at 24 Fairway Dr. in Barrington due to continuous noise and pollution emitted by gas-powered lawn equipment; mainly the 2-cycle engine gas-powered leaf blower.
  - The excessive noise and extremely asphyxiating emissions coming from 2-cycle gas-powered leaf blowers were so intense, I could not be outside (nor could my family and dog) in my own yard during their frequent operation (and for a period afterwards due to high particulate matter circulating in the air).
  - The excessive and wall penetrating (low frequency) noise emitted from gas-powered leaf blowers throughout the day in my neighborhood were inescapable and detrimental to working from home.
- During testimony at a Barrington Town Council meeting on issues residents were having with gas-powered leaf blowers, one resident reflected on the sad situation her dying mother had to endure from constant and excessive noise emitted from gas-powered leaf blowers outside her window. Imagine your last days' alive being inside your own home and being assaulted constantly with the terrifying effects coming from these egregious machines.

Thank you very much for considering my input, and thank you to Representative Boylan for introducing this important bill.

George Voutes

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