

*Via Electronic Mail*

May 13, 2025

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney  
Chair, House Finance Committee  
Room 35, State House  
Providence, RI 02903

Re: CLF **Supports** House Bill No. 5195 – Composting and Organic Waste Diversion

Dear Chair Abney:

Conservation Law Foundation (“CLF”) appreciates the opportunity to comment on House Bill No. 5195, which would establish a compost fund from which the Department of Environmental Management (“DEM”) would award grants to assist with the costs of developing, implementing, and expanding composting infrastructure, equipment, education, and local programs related to diverting organic solid waste from the state’s Central Landfill. We offer our enthusiastic support for this bill.

Founded in 1966, CLF is a member-supported non-profit advocacy organization working to protect public health and the environment and build healthy communities in Rhode Island and throughout New England. Through its Zero Waste Project, CLF aims to improve waste management through source reduction, recycling, and composting, and to protect our communities from the dangers posed by unsustainable waste management practices.

## **I. Organic Waste: Treasure or Trash?**

H-5195 is designed to transform compostable organic waste from Rhode Island’s trash to Rhode Island’s treasure.

When diverted from the Central Landfill and composted, organic waste becomes treasure. Treasure to Rhode Island’s cities and towns in the form of immediate reductions in expensive solid waste disposal fees. Treasure to Rhode Island citizens in the form of lower municipal taxes or an increase in other beneficial public services paid for by the reductions in municipal solid waste disposal fees. Treasure to Rhode Island’s soils, which are able to grow healthier and more nutritious plants and food; have better water holding capacity and water infiltration; be more resilient to drought and extreme weather; and better prevent erosion and runoff, thus protecting and restoring waterways. Treasure to our environment in the form of reduced methane emissions

and more robust carbon sequestration, significantly helping Rhode Island meet its Act on Climate mandates.<sup>1</sup>

If dumped in the landfill, the organic waste is trashed as municipal solid waste. Continued trashing of organic waste will shorten the life of the Central Landfill; increase municipal solid waste disposal fees; increase property taxes to Rhode Island citizens or cause a reduction in beneficial public services; substantially contribute to climate change in the form of increased methane emissions; and further deplete the health and resilience of our soils.

## **II. A Funding Program with Many Carrots and One Important Stick**

H-5195 establishes a two dollar per ton surcharge on solid waste processed by a refuse disposal system (e.g., the Central Landfill).<sup>2</sup> This surcharge must be paid by the individual or entity disposing of solid waste at a refuse disposal system, which includes municipally contracted waste haulers.<sup>3</sup> The Institute for Local Self-Reliance (“ISLR”) highlights eight different states and two counties that allocate revenue from waste disposal surcharges to fund waste diversion, reuse, recycling, composting, and other sustainability efforts. As noted by ISLR, a per-ton surcharge on waste landfilled has “a proven track record of raising funds to reduce and recycle waste.”<sup>4</sup>

A municipality can avoid the sting of this surcharge by adopting measures that lessen the amount of organic waste it ultimately dumps at the Central Landfill. Economic forecasts developed by The Rhode Island Food Policy Council (“RIFPC”) indicates that a municipality can avoid any negative financial affect from this surcharge by diverting approximately seven percent of its organic waste from the Central Landfill to composting operations. Moreover, municipalities will be eligible to participate in Municipal Waste Diversion Grants established in this legislation to fund developing and implementing activities that advance food waste prevention, food rescue and recovery, composting, or minimizing illegal dumping in the state.<sup>5</sup>

The RIFPC projects that approximately \$1.2 million dollars per year will be raised by this surcharge, all of which must be deposited into a Compost Fund, which is to be administered by DEM.<sup>6</sup> Five percent of the Compost Fund is available to cover its administrative costs, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-6.2-9.

<sup>2</sup> See House Bill 5195 at § 42-6.3-4.

<sup>3</sup> See *id.*

<sup>4</sup> See *Surcharges on Waste Disposal Fund Composting*, ISLR (Feb. 4, 2022), available at <https://ilsr.org/disposal-surcharges-fund-composting/>.

<sup>5</sup> See House Bill 5195 § 42-6.3-8.

<sup>6</sup> See *id.* at § 42-6.3-5.

the two grant funds established by H-5195.<sup>7</sup> The remaining amount of the Compost Fund shall be divided equally between a Municipal Waste Diversion Grant Fund<sup>8</sup> and a Competitive Composting and Waste Diversion Grant Fund.<sup>9</sup> The purpose of the Composting and Waste Diversion Grant Fund is to award grants to eligible entities to assist with the costs of developing and implementing compost production, compost use, and waste diversion efforts.<sup>10</sup> In this regard, H-5195 mandates that DEM give priority to projects that, among other criteria, are led by low-income, socially disadvantaged, beginning, small, women, or veteran entities, organizations, and businesses.<sup>11</sup>

In short, H-5195 represents a painless, innovative set of policies that will permanently benefit Rhode Island and its municipalities, citizens, and environment. We therefore ask that you support passage of H-5195.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,



Richard Stang  
Senior Attorney  
Conservation Law Foundation

cc: Members of the House Finance Committee  
Deputy Majority Leader Lauren Carson  
Representative Jennifer Boylan  
Representative Matthew S. Dawson  
Representative June Speakman  
Representative Rebecca Kislak  
Representative Arthur Handy  
Representative David A. Bennett  
Representative Michelle McGaw  
Darrèll Brown, Vice President, Rhode Island, Conservation Law Foundation

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<sup>7</sup> *See id.*

<sup>8</sup> *See id.* at § 42-6.3-7.

<sup>9</sup> *See id.* at § 42-6.3-6.

<sup>10</sup> *See id.*

<sup>11</sup> *See id.*