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Providence, RI 02909
401-212-0832

Chairman Marvin Abney
House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

May 12, 2025

Re: House Bill 7684- The RI Land Trust Council SUPPORTs of the Urban & Small Farm Success Act

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the Committee,

The RI Land Trust Council (the Council) is the state coalition of more than 50 land trusts – community-based organizations formed to protect important open spaces, farms, forests, historic sites, and watersheds. We believe that all Rhode Islanders deserve safe, healthy, and affordable homes with access to clean air, clean water, healthy food, and green spaces. We strongly support House Bill 5534 because it levels the playing field for Rhode Island’s fastest growing agricultural sector - urban and small farms.

The Urban & Small Farm Success Act presents an opportunity to further support the conservation of farmland and promote the economic successes of small-scale farms by making small and equitable changes to Rhode Island’s farm tax programs. For more than three decades, land trusts across Rhode Island have collaborated with communities to preserve both urban and rural farmland, and have committed to better facilitate access for farmers looking for land. We firmly believe that maintaining Rhode Island’s working farms under the stewardship of the farmers who cultivate food and goods for our communities is paramount. By doing so, we improve the resilience of our local food systems and contribute to the vibrancy of Rhode Island’s economy.

Small and urban farms are essential contributors to our food system, economy, and public health. These farms provide fresh food, job training, outdoor education, and social connection—often in communities historically excluded from farmland ownership and access. These farms are environmentally beneficial, mitigating stormwater runoff and sequestering carbon across all landscapes. House bill 5534 establishes clear definitions of “small” and “urban” farms in Rhode Island law for the first time. This is critical because in recent years, Rhode Island has seen significant growth among new and beginning farmers, particularly within cities, and on smaller parcels under 5 acres. These small farms make up the fastest growing sector of Rhode Island agriculture.

The escalating costs of farmland in Rhode Island, coupled with mounting development pressures, present challenges to accessing and affording farmland for nearly all new and beginning farmers. House Bill 5534 provides qualified small and urban farmers with critical tax relief through property and income tax exemptions, as well as farm equipment sales tax exemptions. The existing system disproportionately benefits farmers in rural communities while leaving out historically marginalized farmers, especially those in urban areas. The Urban and Small Farms Success Act takes a crucial step towards rectifying these disparities and promoting equity across Rhode Island’s agricultural sector. These changes are fair, fiscally responsible, and aligned with Rhode Island’s goals for economic equity, climate resilience, and local food security.

The landscape of Rhode Island farms has changed drastically, and it is time for our farm tax programs to catch up with those changes. We urge the Committee to support and advance House Bill 5534 for the benefit of all Rhode Island farmers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kate Sayles", written over a light blue rectangular background.

Kate Sayles, Director