

March 5, 2026

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney, Chair
House Finance Committee
Rhode Island House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: HOUSE BUDGET BILL 7126 – ARTICLE 3 SECTION 16 - STATE FACILITIES BENCHMARKING AND PERFORMANCE STANDARDS PROGRAM

Chair Abney and Honorable Committee Members,

On behalf of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, I respectfully submit testimony in support of House Budget Bill 7126, Article 3, Section 16, specifically the provision establishing an Energy Benchmarking Program for Public Buildings with technical and financial assistance provided by the Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources (OER).

The League strongly supports this provision because it appropriately balances the State's energy goals with municipal flexibility and capacity.

Under subsection (d), OER is directed to provide technical and financial assistance to municipalities for a voluntary benchmarking program covering public buildings greater than 25,000 square feet. This is a critical component. Many municipalities recognize the value of energy benchmarking as a tool to identify inefficiencies, prioritize capital investments, and reduce long-term operating costs. However, limited staff capacity and fiscal constraints can make participation challenging without dedicated support.

By explicitly providing both technical and financial assistance, this proposal ensures that municipalities can participate without diverting scarce local resources from essential services. This partnership approach respects the fiscal realities facing cities and towns while advancing statewide energy efficiency objectives.

The provision also requires OER to maintain a publicly accessible website tracking implementation and to submit annual progress reports to the Governor and General Assembly beginning May 1, 2028. These reporting requirements promote transparency and accountability while allowing the program to evolve based on measurable outcomes and municipal participation levels.

Importantly, the voluntary nature of this program is essential. Municipal buildings vary widely in age, condition, staffing capacity, and financial circumstances. Allowing participation on a voluntary basis encourages collaboration rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all mandate. It creates an opportunity for municipalities ready to engage in benchmarking to do so with meaningful support, while not penalizing communities that may need additional time or resources.

In short, this provision represents a thoughtful and collaborative model:

- It advances energy efficiency goals;
- It supports municipalities with real technical and financial assistance;
- It ensures transparency through reporting; and
- It preserves local flexibility through voluntary participation.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our perspective and for your continued partnership with Rhode Island's cities and towns. We appreciate your thoughtful consideration of this important measure.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "R. Rossi".

Randy R. Rossi
Executive Director

Cc: Honorable Members of House Finance Committee