The Nature Conservancy
Rhode Island

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March 5, 2026

Representative Marvin L. Abney
Chair, House Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence RI 02908

Re: The Nature Conservancy Comments on Energy Sections of the Proposed FY27 Budget

The Nature Conservancy appreciates the opportunity to provide these comments. TNC is a global organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. We have chapters in all fifty U.S. states and in over 80 countries around the globe. Here in Rhode Island, we steward more than 12,000 acres of protected land, and we have partnered to protect 35,000 acres of land. At The Nature Conservancy, we realize that we cannot succeed in our core mission to protect the land and water on which all life depends without seriously addressing climate change.

Article 3, Section 16: Energy Benchmarking

In our mission to protect Rhode Island's natural environment, we must also address our built environment. Based on a 2025 report from the Executive Climate Change Coordinating Council, emissions from buildings are estimated to be up to 49% of total greenhouse gas emissions in the state and therefore are a critical piece of the puzzle in the full decarbonization picture.

As a science-based organization, The Nature Conservancy understands the importance of decision-making based on gathering and analyzing data. The *Energy Benchmarking and Performance Standards Program* accomplishes this by introducing benchmarking across large state-owned and operated buildings. Measuring energy usage and associated emissions is a critical first step, and allows for science-based, measurable performance standards to be put in place that align with the Act on Climate.

State owned and operated facilities are crucial step forward in decarbonizing the building sector and making meaningful progress towards our net-zero goals. We also recognize that state-owned buildings are just a portion of the total inventory of large buildings in the state and look forward to further implementation of benchmarking and performance standards for other building types including the municipal and private sectors.

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Article 11: Sections 3-11 Energy Regulation and Affordability

Cap on Energy Efficiency Programs

This section puts a $75 million cap on energy efficiency programs that have successfully brought real, quantifiable benefits to Rhode Islanders. The 2025 Energy Efficiency Council report states that every $1 of investment in energy efficiency results in $3 of benefit to Rhode Islanders. The benefits of energy efficiency are not just environmental; there are significant benefits to the RI economy and workforce.

The Least Cost Procurement statute, passed by the RI General Assembly in 2006, is based on the recognition of the legislature that **investing in energy efficiency is the least-cost approach** before procuring additional supply and investing in infrastructure expansion. To cap this program significantly limits the tools available in the toolkit to provide real lower-cost energy solutions to Rhode Islanders.

Renewable Energy Standard

According to RIDEM's 2023 Greenhouse Gas Inventory (the most recent data available), electricity consumption accounts for about 20% of Rhode Island's greenhouse gas emissions. The Renewable Energy Standard requires RI to procure 100% of electricity from renewable sources by 2033. The FY27 budget proposes to push out the date to 2050, significantly slowing progress on renewable energy development.

Renewable energy is proven to provide cost stability for ratepayers, rather than the price volatility of fossil fuels. Reports from across the country show that **there is no significant correlation between deployment of wind and solar and higher energy costs**. In addition, these resources are more reliable than traditional fossil fuel infrastructure.
In addition, the impacts of climate change (including storm frequency and intensity and extreme weather) are forcing more grid infrastructure investments to ensure reliable power. Renewable energy deployment is an obvious way to combat climate change by lowering greenhouse gas emissions that lead to climate impacts.

Grid Access Fee

Rhode Island has made significant progress in solar deployment through progressive policies and programs that recognize the importance of renewable energy in our system mix. There have been several large-scale solar projects constructed in Rhode Island, specifically in preferred sites that provide clean, reliable power. The Grid Access Fee proposed on large-scale renewable energy projects **disrupts the economics of existing renewable energy installations** and institutes cost burdens on projects that were constructed under specific economic conditions. RI has made progress to ensure large-scale solar development is sited responsibly and in line with our climate goals. Requiring this fee would threaten to destabilize the market and cut good-paying clean energy jobs.

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The Nature Conservancy is committed to a future where both nature and people thrive. We understand and are sensitive to cost concerns regarding energy affordability and believe that good policy to address these concerns should incorporate the best available science and data on how to provide relief to ratepayers.

In the face of a changing climate, now is the time to work towards meaningful implementation of the climate legislation passed by the General Assembly of the last 5 years. To backtrack on such significant progress endangers our climate, our economy, and the well-being of all Rhode Islanders.

Sincerely,

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The Nature Conservancy
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