



Audubon Society of Rhode Island

1 April 2026

Maxwell McFarland, Director of Advocacy

RE: Testimony on House Bill 7127 — An Act Relating to Appropriations for the Support of the State for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2027

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

On behalf of the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, representing our 17,000 members and supporters, and as one of the largest land trusts in the state – stewarding nearly 10,000 acres for people, birds, and other wildlife – I welcome the opportunity to work with this committee, and the General Assembly, to find ways of improving support for the Department of Environmental Management. DEM serves the ultimate role in Rhode Island: overseeing nearly the entirety of the state’s environmental protection, natural resources, local food and agriculture. DEM serves an essential function as it relates to our efforts at Audubon. Through awarding non-profits like us and municipalities green and local open space grants, they help bring community desires for equitable access to the outdoors and critical habitat protection to fruition. A specific example of these funds in action is Audubon’s acquisition of 23 acres along the Hunt River between East Greenwich and North Kingstown. DEM awarded Audubon with \$200,000, made possible by the 2022 Green Bond, to protect this riparian habitat, matching the \$200,000 driven by local donors, to cover the total acquisition cost.

I emphasize this example because there are several worthy applicants who have done the groundwork, aiming to protect lands in and around their community. Most often, these applicants are not requesting DEM to foot the full cost or bring mere thoughts into reality, rather, they are looking for a solid partnership to help them cross the finish line on projects that have proven, material benefit. Whether as seed funding or matching funds, sometimes at nearly 2:1, DEM does what it can, with limited funds, to support an overwhelming number of requests to protect habitat, wildlife, and our climate. With more funding, DEM can improve this public-private partnership in conservation and environmental protection. As Audubon tracks proposed legislation that would further grow DEM’s role and oversight for various environmental matters, we recognize the human and financial resource burden this places on the agency. There are simple-fix solutions to funding parts of the agency. For instance, revenue created by DEM’s pesticide applicator and violation fees should remain within DEM rather than being deposited into the state’s general fund, which is currently the case.

With an ever-present need for robust climate and environmental protection, we must ensure the agency tasked with overseeing these issues for our state is properly staffed and funded to meet the challenges of today and the future, while supporting nonprofits, communities, and cities so that they may collectively take part in those efforts.

Regards,

Maxwell McFarland, Director of Advocacy

Connecting All People With Nature

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