

Dear Representative Abney and members of the House Finance Committee,

Please support H8144. The Green Bond must include funding for farmland and open space preservation in order to fully address the social and environmental needs of our state.

As an environmental sociologist, I study the dynamics of agriculture and the effects of open space on nearby residents. There are many reasons to support funding for farmland and open space preservation.

First, our agricultural system is at risk because it's hard for people to get started in farming. The population of current farmers is aging, with the latest data from the USDA finding average farmer age in the US is over 58 years. That's the average. As current farmers age into retirement, who will replace them? There are many young people who want to get into farming, but can't—simply because they don't have access to farmland. Due to long-term trends of farm consolidation and competition for real estate, we now have a scarcity of "starter farms" to help aspiring farmers get a foothold in the industry. Here in Rhode Island, we have the most expensive farmland in the nation, compounding this problem. Green Bond funds to support farmland preservation will help create a foothold for young people who want to become farmers and support our local food system.

Second, we need to fund open space preservation in both urban and rural areas, because open space is really important for Rhode Islanders' wellbeing. Numerous studies show that people who have access to green spaces have better physical and mental health, and they are more likely to form positive relationships with neighbors, meaning the community overall becomes stronger and healthier. Neighborhoods with usable green space tend to see reductions in gun violence, crime, and resident perceptions of social disorder. Green space is also good for property values and local economic development. There are so many reasons to preserve open spaces and include funding for them in the Green Bond.

Please vote yes on H8144. Thank you.

Kind regards,
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