



Rhode Island Recreation and Parks Association
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March 24, 2026

House Finance Committee

Rhode Island General Assembly

Re: Testimony in Support of House Bill 8144 - Capital Development Program, 2026 Green Economy Bond Referenda *Outdoor Recreation Grants*

We are writing to respectfully urge you to increase the funding to the Outdoor Recreational Grant program (k) House Bill 8144 - Capital Development Program, 2026 Green Economy Bond Referenda.

We acknowledge that there are economical pressures that are driving reductions but we believe that cutting recreational funding undermines essential services that strengthen our communities. Recreation is a foundational public service that delivers measurable social, physical and economic benefits.

The Green Bond is one of the most successful approved bonds in Rhode Island. Trends through the years show that environmental and recreational bonds are consistently approved, often by wide margins. In 2024 alone, voters approved a \$53 million "green economy" bond with 67.2% approval rate. Rising costs of infrastructure and federal funding are continually being reduced, it is even more important for the state to prioritize their funding opportunities for their citizens. Data collected from RI Department of Environmental Management shows a consistent unmet demand for funding, in more recent years in the amount of over 10 million dollars. While we do recognize that there is \$8 million for facility improvement that is allocated for the state recreational facilities, we are expressing the importance of the local facilities. These are the facilities that are accessible to the local residents.

(See data chart below.)

Outdoor recreational programming is not a luxury—it is a public investment with profitable return. The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, in partnership with the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, has measured the outdoor recreation economy at approximately \$788 billion in annual contribution to the nation's GDP – representing nearly 2% of the total U.S. economy. Locally, the NRPA has documented that parks and recreation agencies generate more than \$154 billion in economic activity each year and support over 1.1 million jobs nationwide. These are not abstract figures; they reflect the real economic output of the parks, trails, facilities, and programs that state investment makes possible.

Access to parks, youth sports, community centers, and structured recreational activities is directly linked to improving mental health outcomes, reducing anxiety and depression, lowering substance abuse rates, and providing stronger community cohesion.

Research from the National Recreation and Park Association shows that communities with well-funded recreation programs and facilities experience reduced crime rates, improved youth development outcomes, and stronger economic resilience. Recreation spaces are proven to increase property values, attract businesses and long-term residents, attract visitors and economic development, and reduce long-term healthcare costs by promoting preventative wellness.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, regular physical activity significantly reduces symptoms of depression and improves overall psychological well-being. Recreation programs provide safe, structured environments that encourage this activity—especially for children, teens, seniors, and underserved populations.

At a time when mental health challenges are rising and communities are still recovering socially and economically, cutting recreational grants would disproportionately impact families who rely on subsidized programs and free public facilities. For many communities, these grants are the difference between access and exclusion.

The average developmental project in recreational areas costs about \$400,000 - \$500,000 per acre. Allocating just one million dollars for these projects will not provide adequate funding throughout the state and various entities. When recreational funding is cut, it is the people of this state who feel the real impact. Fewer dollars mean fewer projects can be rewarded, resulting in fewer parks being built, improved, or maintained. Ultimately, this leaves more communities without access to the recreational spaces they need and increases the already growing unmet demand.

We respectfully ask that you support the increase in the allocated funding for the outdoor Recreation Grants on Bill 8144 - Capital Development Program, 2026 Green Economy Bond Referenda proving the shared value and critical importance of this program to the health, safety, revenues and vitality within the Rhode Island communities.

Thank you for your service and for your consideration of this urgent matter.

Respectfully,

The Rhode Island Recreation and Parks Association

Chelsey Dumas-Gibbs

RIRPA Secretary and Chair to the Legislation subcommittee

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Data chart as referenced in letter

Grant Round Year	Bond Year	Bond Amount	#Apps Rec'd	Amount Awarded	Unmet Demand	Notes
2020	2018	\$5,000,000	55	\$5,794,037.00	\$7,290,221.00	
2022	2020	\$4,000,000	54	\$4,064,080	\$10,331,296.00	
2024	2022	\$2,000,000	41	\$2,012,445.00	\$7,464,600.00	
2026	2024	\$5,000,000	50	\$5,093,352	\$11,423,895	
2028	2026	<i>\$1,000,000</i>				Bond amount to be confirmed, pending