

Testimony in Support of H 8144:

George Voutes, 17 Shore Road, Bristol RI, 02809

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Dear Chairman Abney and House Finance Committee Members,

I submit testimony in Support of H 8144. The Governor's new budget does not include ***essential funding for land and water conservation programs*** and H 8144 is a significant step in the direction of such conservation.

H 8144 also helps fund continuation of RI's Open Space program through DEM to bring the program back to historic levels of land conservation. RI's Open Space Program is used to acquire and conserve lands of statewide interest and significance, including ecologically valuable land that enhances RI's management areas, parks, and important forest lands. Funding for these acquisitions is often matched by contributions from municipalities, land trusts, and federal programs. Not having state funding support for Open Space acquisition, mean no (or very limited) matching contributions.

One area missing from H 8144 is to ensure a process for public input and oversight on the specific areas / projects funded by the Green Bond – H 8144. Once the Green Bond is approved and budget availability happens, the public need to be made aware (in advance) of specific projects being planned BEFORE they are executed, and be able to challenge (if necessary) whether a program/project is still necessary or relevant. More DEM transparency in how/where/when Green Bond funds are being planned for and spent is essential. Such transparency is missing from H 8144 and should be included in a final version of the bill.

Thank you.

George Voutes