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April 13, 2026

Attn: Representative Abney, Chair, House Finance Committee and Committee Members

Testimony in Support of H 8144

An Act Relating to the Capital Development Program
Before the House Finance Committee

Rhode Island Farm Bureau is an independent, non-governmental grassroots organization of farm families united to enhance and strengthen the lives of rural Americans, and to build strong, prosperous agricultural communities. Today our over 1000 members are not only large farmers and small farmers but also those engaged in agricultural industries, teachers of agriculture, and consumers.

The lack of almost any truly “Green” bonds, specifically farmland preservation, in the recent Green Bond is a blow to agriculture in Rhode Island. **The Rhode Island Farm Bureau is in support of H 8144 An Act Relating to the Capital Development Program, particularly adding \$7 Million to the Green Bond for Farmland and Open Space Protection.**

- Released every five years, the 2022 Census of Agriculture shows Rhode Island is the only New England state showing an increase in **both** the number of farms and land in farms between 2017 and 2022. Nationally, agriculture lost 20 million acres between 2017 and 2022, and there are nearly 142,000 fewer farmers in 2022 than in 2017. In that same time frame, RI recorded an increase of 2,200 acres farmed and added 11 producers.
- The \$2 Million proposed for farmland preservation is critical to preserving some of the last important farms in the state. RI DEM currently has a backlog of farms that are in various stages of appraisal or review. Leaving this program unfunded also **leaves federal funding on the table.**
- RI farms support our state economy with over 1100 farm businesses, close to 4000 jobs, and \$250 million in direct revenue.
- Rhode Island has the most expensive farmland per acre of any state in the country at \$22,500 per acre (USDA value in 2025), more than 35% higher than NJ Ag land, the second highest in the nation at \$16,600 per acre. Nearly 10% of RI’s landmass is agricultural land.
- Conserving farmland is critical to agriculture in our state. We must conserve farmland and open spaces across Rhode Island. High agricultural land values combined with a high cost of living make the sale of farmland tempting to farm owners. Farmland preservation provides the opportunity for families to keep their land in production and allows for the land to be passed down through generations or sold to remain in agricultural production, potentially to a new or beginning farmer. The USDA ranks RI #1 in the country by percentage of beginning producers, with 41% of our state’s farmers falling into that category. Overall, U.S. producers are classified as beginning farmers.

- Local farms provide long-term food security. When Covid hit, food supply chains came to a halt, and we saw RI farms ramp up production to provide local meats and vegetables. Many smaller RI farms increased production during the pandemic, and six years later they continue to maintain that production and their increased customer bases. We need to support Rhode Island's farms to be ready for future supply chain disruptions.
- RI showed a significant increase in the market value of products sold on a total and per farm basis; the total market value was \$93 million in 2022, up from \$58 million in 2017; and the per farm market value was \$88,074 in 2022 up from \$55,607 in 2017.
- Rhode Island's farmland, forests, and open space are critical to our economy and our identity. They are important to the health and well-being of our citizens, and an important draw for our tourism industry.

The Rhode Island Farm Bureau would like to thank Representative Cotter and her co-sponsors for introducing **H 8144**. We urge the committee to support **H 8144**, allowing the voters to weigh in on these Green Bonds.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Henry B. Wright III", enclosed within a thin yellow rectangular border.

Henry B. Wright III
President, RI Farm Bureau