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April 13, 2026

Chair Marvin Abney  
House Committee on Finance  
State House  
Providence, RI 02903

**Re: H8144 -The RI Land Trust Council SUPPORTS the Green Bond with the amendment of \$17.5 million in funding for conservation programs**

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the Committee:

The Rhode Island Land Trust Council (the Council) is the statewide coalition of over 50 land trusts—community-based organizations formed to conserve land and water resources for the public’s benefit. We believe that all Rhode Islanders deserve a safe, affordable, and healthy place to live with access to clean air, clean water, open spaces for recreation, and local food. For over 30 years, land trusts have worked in partnership with the State to conserve parks, community gardens, farms, and forests throughout Rhode Island.

The Council supports H 8144 and appreciates Representative Cotter’s leadership to Make the Green Bond Greener. The bill makes critical investments in Rhode Island’s environment and community infrastructure, including funding for Fort Adams and Camp Rocky Farm, which will support public access and recreation.

At the same time, we remain concerned that land and water conservation programs that municipalities, land trusts, and state agencies rely on were not included in the Governor’s original proposal. We respectfully ask the General Assembly to amend the Green Bond through H 8144 to include \$17.5 million, including conservation funding that is consistent with DEM’s FY27 capital budget request:

- \$3 million for the State Open Space Program, which enables the State to acquire and conserve lands of statewide significance, including ecologically valuable landscapes that enhance DEM’s management areas, parks, and important forests.
- \$3 million for the Outdoor Recreation Grant Program, a competitive matching grant program that supports municipalities in acquiring, developing, and rehabilitating outdoor recreational lands and facilities.
- \$2 million for Farmland Preservation through the Agricultural Land Preservation Commission (ALPC). There are 15 of farms approved and awaiting final protection, and 52 on the waitlist, but there is insufficient funding to move them forward. Preserving farmland keeps land in production, supports farm families, and strengthens Rhode Island’s local food system.
- \$2 million for the Local Open Space Matching Grant Program which provides up to 50% matching funds for municipalities, land trusts, and nonprofit conservation organizations to protect valuable open spaces in local communities.

Despite what the State’s capital budget may reflect, funding for these programs is largely committed or already allocated to projects that are moving toward closing, and will be exhausted as the transactions are completed. Conservation projects are complex and take time, requiring strong partnerships among municipalities, land trusts, and willing landowners.

Conservation is a smart and strategic investment for Rhode Island. Every \$1 the state invests in land conservation leverages an additional \$1.70 in federal, municipal, and philanthropic funding. These dollars are otherwise left on the table if state funding is not available.

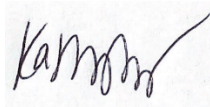
These investments deliver real returns to Rhode Islanders. Conserved lands support our economy through agriculture, tourism, and outdoor recreation, and forestry, while also providing essential services to every community. Conserved lands protect drinking water, reduce flooding, improve public health, cool our communities, and help mitigate climate change by storing and sequestering carbon. These are cost-effective, nature-based solutions that reduce long-term public costs. Rhode Island's farm sector alone supports over 2,500 jobs and generates \$250 million in direct revenue annually, yet our remaining farmland is the most expensive in the country and increasingly at risk of development.

Recent polling conducted by The Nature Conservancy shows strong, bipartisan support for these investments. Rhode Islanders overwhelmingly prioritize funding for clean water, wildlife habitat, forests, and local farms, and 85% of voters agree that land conservation and housing are not in conflict. We can, and must, do both.

Including funding for conservation in the Green Bond ensures that Rhode Island is making the most of every public dollar while delivering lasting benefits to our communities. Without this investment, Rhode Island risks losing irreplaceable open spaces, and missing critical opportunities to strengthen our environment, economy, and public health.

We respectfully ask you to include conservation funding in H 8144 to ensure Rhode Island's investments are comprehensive, balanced, and forward-looking.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kate Sayles", is written over a light gray rectangular background.

Kate Sayles, Director