



Dear Members of the Rhode Island General Assembly,

Continuing your commitment to Rhode Island’s education infrastructure, we urge you to modernize and decarbonize Rhode Island’s public-school buildings. These critical modifications can be made using currently available ARPA funds in connection with a second school construction bond in 2022. Investments to fully decarbonize by 2030 using the strongest labor standards will address multiple critical needs for Rhode Islanders.

Maintaining outdated energy systems prevent school districts from making greater investments in our students. This is money that could be better invested to improve school curriculum and to improve other needs. Furthermore, outdated energy systems are shown to have negative human health and environmental impacts. By constructing green and healthy school buildings with good local jobs, Rhode Island will be working to safeguard our future where it matters most: our kids. Directing investments to healthy & carbon free schools means:

**Addressing critical infrastructure deficits in public school buildings.**

Rhode Island has just begun the hard work to improve and modernize schools. More than \$1.4 billion has already been allocated since 2018 to update or replace 176 school buildings throughout the state. This flood of capital and up-front incentives has effectively spurred communities to make once-in-a-generation investments in our school buildings.

However, the existing investment is not enough to meet the dire need throughout our state. Conditions in many of our school buildings continue to be unacceptable. Poor ventilation, crumbling ceilings, leaky roofs, mold, rotted pipes, and lead service lines not only risk the health and safety of children, but they also lead to poor learning outcomes. Often, some schools in the worst condition exist in low-income communities of color, where decades of disinvestment translate into lower graduation rates and higher asthma rates. Statewide, approximately \$35.2



million per year<sup>1</sup> is spent on school energy costs for electric, natural gas, and heating oil. Eliminating those costs will allow our education dollars to be spent on our children.

### **Jumpstarting implementation of the Act on Climate.**

Our children bear the burden of our climate crisis. Not only will they be left with lasting negative impacts of our changing climate, but they are especially susceptible to the air pollution from our current energy systems.<sup>2</sup> Rhode Island needs to begin dialing down our dependence on fossil fuels to avoid catastrophic climate change and meet its Act on Climate goals<sup>3</sup>. Energy use from buildings represents a significant share of that dependence. As Rhode Island considers effective pathways to decarbonize buildings, we can begin to tackle this challenge by starting with every public-school building in the state. Public schools represent both a low hanging fruit and a high priority for early action.

### **Building the Clean Energy Workforce with Quality Jobs.**

It's time to fully transition our schools into the clean energy future with good, skilled union jobs. By ensuring strong labor standards, like Project Labor Agreements (PLA) and Community Workforce Agreements currently being used by school districts on projects, future retrofits and new school construction will create thousands of good union jobs and opportunities to train new community members into family-supporting careers in the building trades. Additionally, strong labor standards ensure that work is done right, done once, and done on time. The Labor Leading on Climate Initiative at the Worker Institute of Cornell University estimates<sup>4</sup> that transitioning all K-12 public schools in Rhode Island to net-zero emissions would create a total of 11,209 direct jobs over a span of nine years. An investment in our workers is an investment in our communities.

In addition to helping districts meet Rhode Island school construction requirements<sup>5</sup> and Northeast CHPS standards<sup>6</sup>, this historic state investment in our future would fund infrastructure that allows school buildings to generate as much energy as they use over the course of a year. Potential examples could include:

- Meeting the highest efficiency standards in design, construction, windows, walls, insulation, roofing, plumbing, appliances, and HVAC systems.
- On-site solar installations.
- On-site geothermal installations.
- Heat pumps.
- Battery storage systems.

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<sup>1</sup> *State of Rhode Island Schoolhouses*. School Building Authority at the Rhode Island Department of Education. 2017. [https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Funding-and-Finance-Wise-Investments/SchoolBuildingAuthority/RIDE-Facility-Condition-Report2017\\_FINAL.PDF](https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Funding-and-Finance-Wise-Investments/SchoolBuildingAuthority/RIDE-Facility-Condition-Report2017_FINAL.PDF)

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Grossman. "How fossil fuel use threatens kids' health". *Science News for Students*. October 25, 2016. <https://www.sciencenewsforstudents.org/article/how-fossil-fuel-use-threatens-kids-health>

<sup>3</sup> 45% below 1990 levels by 2030. 80% below 1990 levels by 2040. Net-zero emissions by 2050.

<sup>4</sup> *Building a Just Transition for A Resilient Future: A Climate Jobs Program for Rhode Island*. The Labor Leading on Climate Initiative at the Worker Institute of Cornell University. (Forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> 200-RICR-20-05-4. Rhode Island Department of Education. <https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Funding-and-Finance-Wise-Investments/SchoolBuildingAuthority/School-Construction-Regulations.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> *Northeast CHPS Verified Program 4.0*. Northeast Energy Efficiency Partnerships. April 2021. [https://neep.org/sites/default/files/media-files/ne\\_chps\\_v4.0\\_clean\\_final\\_draft.pdf](https://neep.org/sites/default/files/media-files/ne_chps_v4.0_clean_final_draft.pdf)



Putting Rhode Island on the path to green and healthy schools with strong labor standards allows us to combat climate change, keep our kids and staff safe, improve learning outcomes, keep money in our communities, and create thousands of good union jobs. We urge you to begin with a down payment on this opportunity in a bond referendum in 2022 and prioritize the first investments in frontline communities of color who for decades have borne the brunt of environmental injustice. With \$1.4 billion in school construction already approved since 2018, we also ask that you set aside ARPA funds for school districts that are undergoing or will soon have projects underway, so that they can invest in projects that were not originally planned.

Let's not waste this golden opportunity to begin fixing what is broken and mobilize our transition to a carbon-free and healthy future.

Sincerely,

Climate Jobs Rhode Island - Erica Hammond, *Organizer*  
Rhode Island Building and Construction Trades Council - Michael Sabitoni, *President*  
RI Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals - Frank Flynn, *President*  
National Education Association Rhode Island - Lawrence E. Purtill, *President*  
Rhode Island AFL-CIO - George Nee, *President*  
The Nature Conservancy - Sheila Dormody, *Director Climate and Cities Programs*  
Clean Water Action RI - Johnathan Berard, *RI State Director*  
Audubon Society of Rhode Island - Lawrence Taft, *Executive Director*  
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local Union 99 - Joe Walsh, *Business Manager*  
Acadia Center - Hank Webster, *Rhode Island Director & Senior Policy Advocate*  
International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, DC 11 - Justin Kelley, *Business Representative*  
Green Energy Consumers Alliance - Kai Salem, *Policy Coordinator*  
Groundwork Rhode Island - Amelia Rose, *Executive Director*  
Building Futures RI - Andrew Cortes, *Executive Director*  
RI Environmental Education Association - Jeanine Silversmith, *Executive Director*  
Environment Council RI - Priscilla De La Cruz, *President*  
American Association of University Professors/URI Chapter - Jay Walsh, *Executive Director*  
Prosperity for RI - Greg Gerritt, *Research Director*  
Amalgamated Transit Union Local 618 - Nick DeCristofaro, *President*  
Providence Central Labor Council - Paul MacDonald, *President*  
FILARSKI/ARCHITECTURE + PLANNING + RESEARCH - Kenneth J. Filarski, *Principal*  
U.S. Green Building Council Rhode Island - Kenneth J. Filarski, *Chair*  
Rhode Island Council 94, AFSCME, AFLCIO - J Michael Downey, *President*  
UniteHere Local 26 - Nancy Iadeluca, *RI State Director*  
RI Committee on Occupational Safety and Health - James Celenza, *Director*  
International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers Local 3 - Richard Pacheco, *Vice President*  
Fuerza Laboral - Heiny Maldonado, *Executive Director*  
Rhode Island Alliance for Retired Americans - John Pernorio, *President*  
International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers Local 400 - Denise Robinson, *President*  
RIC/AFT Faculty Local 1819 - Erik Christiansen, *President*  
Climate Action RI - Justin Boyan, *President*  
Save The Lakes - Judy Colaluca, *President*  
Conservation Law Foundation - Darrèll Brown, *Vice President*  
The Heat and Frost Insulators Local 6 - Jim Lister, *Business Manager*



United Union of Roofers & Water proofers LU 33 - Tony DeMelo, *Vice President/Business Representative*

Childhood Lead Action Project - Laura Brion, *Executive Director*

SMART Northeast Regional Council Local 17 - Patrick Donlan, *Council Representative*

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