

Chairman Abney and Committee Members  
House Committee on Finance  
State House  
Providence, RI 02903

Testimony submitted by Candace Powning, Providence

Re: House Bill 7123 – Governor’s FY 2023 Budget, Article 5, Question 3, Green Economy Bonds

**Position:** I support the Green Economy Bond **with increased funding for land acquisition programs**

Dear Chairman Abney and Committee Members:

My name is Candace Powning and I am a lifelong Providence resident & lover of our state’s beautiful conserved open spaces & incredibly important farmland. I regularly take walks through publicly accessible properties that were conserved using Local Open Space grants. As a city-dweller, these places are particularly important to me as they serve as a respite from the city & provide wonderful opportunities to get fresh air & exercise. Many of these special places were conserved during a time when there was more consistent & plentiful Bond funding for land acquisition programs. Over the past few years, we have seen a steady decline in funding put towards these programs, and I fear that this will cause the rate of land conservation in the state to take a nose dive. At this moment in the climate crisis, MORE, not less funding must be allocated to conserving important forests and working farmlands.

Conserving our state’s forests is an incredibly cost-effective way to sequester carbon, clean our air, & protect essential sources of drinking water -- and we can’t afford to lose more forestland than we already have (nearly 2,000 acres of core forestland in Rhode Island have been converted to other land uses between 2011 and 2018). Besides the Bond, there are no consistent, state-wide sources of funding for forest conservation. Without additional funding to the State Land Acquisition Program and Local Open Space Grants, we will continue to see the loss of important forests in the immediate future. We are asking that the \$3 million for the State Land Acquisition Program be increased to \$5 million & that the \$2 million for the Local Land Acquisition Matching Grant Program be increased to \$3 million.

It is upsetting to see that there is **no funding** listed in the bond to support the Agricultural Land Preservation Commission (ALPC), which is responsible for the Farmland Preservation Program. Rhode Island has the most expensive farmland in the country, at an average \$15,600 per acre. This is largely due to the small amount of farmland we have left, caused by conversion to other uses (namely, residential development). Since the 1940s, Rhode Island alone has lost more than 80% of its farmland to development and forest regrowth. Today, less than 7%, about 40,000 acres, is agriculturally active. Less than 5% of the food consumed in Rhode Island is grown or raised locally. We are **asking for \$3MM added to the bond for funding to support the ALPC**, which 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 (USDA-NRCS Agricultural Land Easement Program).

I strongly urge this committee to expand funding for farmland and open space conservation. The future of our state & the health of our communities depends on this.

Sincerely,  
Candace Powning