



125 Years of Education, Conservation & Advocacy

Audubon Society of Rhode Island

February 17, 2022

Representative Marvin Abney
Chair, House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02908

Re: In Support of H-7125 Capital Development Programs for Education

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the House Committee on Finance,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H-7125 on behalf of Audubon Society of Rhode Island and our 17,000 members and supporters. We thank Representatives Potter, McNamara, Amore, Ruggiero, Cortvriend, Carson, Casimiro, Baginski, Donovan, and Ranglin-Vassell for introducing this important legislation that will move Rhode Island towards **Green and Healthy Schools**¹.

In my professional capacity, I serve as both as the Senior Director of Government Affairs at the Audubon Society of Rhode Island and the Co-chair of the Climate Jobs Rhode Island Coalition.

For 125 years, the Audubon Society of Rhode Island has worked to protect birds, other wildlife, and their habitats through conservation, education, and advocacy, for the benefit of people and all living things. **Audubon's recent strategic plan is entirely built around the climate crisis.** Through this plan, Audubon has committed to direct all our organizational priorities towards addressing the climate crisis, which led Audubon to co-lead the effort to mobilize advocates and Rhode Islanders to support the passage of the 2021 Act On Climate. **This also led Audubon to join environmental partners and labor to form Climate Jobs Rhode Island.** A partnership between labor and environmental groups working together toward a Just Transition to a Green Economy in Rhode Island. Our first shared goal was to establish science-based mandatory and enforceable emissions limits leading to economy-wide 100% net-zero emissions by 2050, with significant, measurable progress before 2030.

This legislation aligns with our shared principle of significantly reducing carbon emissions by 2030—the first interim target of reducing carbon emissions by 45% economy-wide—and provides Rhode Island a tangible path to meeting our Act-On Climate goals. Decarbonizing and modernizing our public school buildings by 2030 is low-hanging fruit and should be a high priority for early climate action. And as we work to decarbonize our building sector, this is a critical and necessary climate action step.

¹ <http://climatejobsri.org/green-and-healthy-schools/>

In summary, Audubon support H7125 for some of the following reasons:

- Proposes a \$300 million bond will support hundreds more projects
- Continues to provide incentive funding for early childhood education, career and technical education, STEAM facilities, and health and safety improvements
- Includes significant incentives for energy efficiency and renewable energy improvements
- Expands environmental standards to meet the state's climate goals
- Adds apprenticeship programs to give workers on school construction jobs the opportunity to learn while they earn
- Provides Incentives for school districts to employ local contractors and minority business enterprises

And all of the above puts into tangible action the recent recommendations of a report authored by Cornell University, Building a Just Transition for a Resilient Future: A Climate Jobs Program for Rhode Island².

Furthermore, this proposal allows the state to take tangible climate action by rebuilding our crumbling public school buildings to be net-zero and targeting the first investments in communities that are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and health risks. Making carbon free schools a reality, will support the creation of thousands of good union careers, and provide the state with an opportunity to advance racial equity by prioritizing investments and workforce development in communities who have suffered from decades of disinvestment impacting every facet of life, including health, housing, heat and pollution exposure—our frontline communities and environmental justice communities who tend to be Black, Indigenous, people of color, and low-income communities, and continue to experience deep inequities heightened throughout the pandemic. For example, in Rhode Island, 10.9% of children have asthma—the 9th highest prevalence in the nation—and students--disproportionately young people of color—miss approximately 14 million school days per year due to asthma as asthma triggers like mold and allergens are common in schools.

Lastly, the state also has the opportunity to: pass on substantial savings to school districts as we do deeper energy efficiency retrofits; rebuilt school buildings without fossil fuels, carbon-free, and instead power them with clean energy. And working together, we can integrate strong labor standards into this climate action step and all clean energy solutions.

The fastest we can move this proposal forward, the sooner we'll see healthier kids with brighter futures and healthier communities. Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,



Priscilla De La Cruz
Senior Director of Government Affairs

² <https://climatejobsri.org/cornell-report-page/>