

**Testimony in support of House Bill 5310, House Committee on Municipal Government & Housing, March 11, 2025, by Peter Trafton, Providence Rhode Island**

Dear Chair Casey and Honorable members of the House committee on Municipal Government and Housing,

**On behalf of the Environment Council of Rhode Island, I write with strong support for Representative Speakman's House Bill 5310.**

It is well-recognized that Rhode Island needs additional support for affordable housing and for land conservation. Rep Speakman's bill provides a means for coordinating and mutually benefiting these efforts. The State of Vermont has done so with a program now 35 years old that has, in that time, produced 15,000 affordable homes, conserved half a million acres of land, and revitalized a number of historic sites for commercial uses.

Rhode Island started down the same path with the Rhode Island housing and conservation trust fund (42 – 113) in 1990. Unfortunately, that effort never got off the ground. So, in 35 years, unlike Vermont, Rhode Island failed to benefit. A study commission reviewed the Rhode Island Housing and Conservation Trust, and produced a thoughtful report in 2006, which emphasized the need for a supportive funding source as well as collaboration between housing and conservation. The report showed the potential that a small but steady real estate transfer fee could have in producing such funding. The current bill provides a structure for such a housing and conservation trust with adequate representation of the various involved parties. Once established, fundraising could be put to use as it has been in Vermont and a few other states.

This remarkable plan to address Rhode Island's needs for land conservation and for affordable housing deserves a serious try, and this bill provides a way forward. Please help it happen.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "PG Trafton". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized.

Peter Trafton

Co-VP of Policy, Environment Council of Rhode Island