



May 20, 2025

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey
Chairman
House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing
82 Smith Street – Room 101
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Written Testimony in Support of HB 5687 – An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government (Energy Facility Siting Act)

Dear Chairman Casey & Fellow Committee Members:

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 5687, which would authorize critical funding mechanisms to advance the undergrounding of portions of the electric transmission line that runs along India Point Park in Providence and East Providence. This legislation represents a pragmatic solution to a decades-long challenge that has significant implications for public safety, economic development, and quality of life in our capital city region.

For over twenty years, the cities of Providence and East Providence have demonstrated their commitment to undergrounding utility infrastructure by foregoing customer credits in 2004 to fund underground transmission lines. Despite this sacrifice by ratepayers and extensive legal proceedings that culminated in a 2022 Rhode Island Supreme Court decision, no underground construction has occurred. Meanwhile, customer credits with accrued interest remain segregated, representing a substantial investment by these communities in infrastructure improvement.

The legislation appropriately requires resolutions from both Providence and East Providence city councils, ensuring that elected officials representing the affected ratepayers formally approve any cost-sharing arrangements. This democratic safeguard protects ratepayers while enabling municipal leaders to make informed decisions about infrastructure investments. While the direct benefits accrue to Providence and East Providence, the improved reliability and economic development potential of this infrastructure investment will benefit the broader Rhode Island economy and electrical grid reliability.

This legislation provides several important advantages:

Public Safety and Resilience: Underground transmission lines are significantly more resilient to severe weather events, reducing the risk of power outages during storms and eliminating safety hazards associated with overhead lines in densely populated areas.

Economic Development: Removing overhead transmission infrastructure along the southern shore of Fox and India Points will unlock development potential in these economically vital waterfront areas, supporting job creation and increased property values.

Environmental and Aesthetic Improvements: Underground lines will improve the visual character of these gateway areas to Rhode Island's capital city while reducing environmental impacts on sensitive waterfront ecosystems.

Fair Cost Allocation: The bill establishes a reasonable framework where the incremental costs of undergrounding are allocated to the communities that directly benefit, while utilizing existing customer credits and exploring additional funding sources.

House Bill 5687 represents a carefully crafted compromise that balances infrastructure needs, fiscal responsibility, and democratic accountability. After more than two decades of delays, this legislation provides a clear path forward for an important infrastructure project that will enhance public safety, support economic development, and improve quality of life in Rhode Island's capital region.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support HB 5687 and advance this important piece of legislation for consideration.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

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