

February 2, 2026

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To: RI House Municipal Government and Housing Committee

Dear Chair Casey and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong opposition to H 7150 which, if passed, would prevent Rhode Island municipalities from regulating and phasing out lawn and landscaping equipment based on fuel type. This cynical bill appears to be an attempt to undercut Providence residents' recent decision to restrict and eventually phase out, in the early 2030s, gas-powered leaf blowers.

To be sure, there is a time for the state to intervene in local affairs. I support this with regard, for example, to overriding local zoning regimes in order to build more housing in the state. However, I do not believe that the state should be in the business of using its considerable power to protect fossil fuel-based industries, especially when clear alternatives are available.

I understand that the governor has recently pivoted toward "affordability," and I strongly support this, especially his decision to back a wealth tax on the richest in our state. However, I do not support sacrificing urgent and reachable climate, environmental, and public health goals on the mantle of affordability. I would rather see affordability goals reached through, for example, an increase in the housing supply, more investment in public transit, and a faster transition to cheaper renewable energy to lower utility prices. It is in these areas that the state stands to make a meaningful dent into the affordability crisis.

As I know from my nearly two years living in Barrington, the landscaping industry has turned many formerly quiet communities, for the better part of the year, into full-time industrial zones plagued by relentless noise and ground-level pollution. Gas-powered leaf blowers are the worst culprits, and they are everywhere, from lawns to parks to schools, sidewalks, parking lots, and beyond. The claim that these tools are a serious public health issue is utterly beyond dispute, and is backed up by reams of scientific evidence accumulated over decades. This body of evidence concerns not only these tools' effects on plants, animals, and the general public, but also their harms to the workers who use them. It makes no economic or social sense to pass legislation that effectively makes it *harder* to address the hazardous working conditions with which actual landscaping workers have to contend. Where is the voice of these workers in this bill? I don't think there is any question that, if landscaping workers fully understood the health hazards they're being exposed to daily, they would support a broad transition to cleaner, healthier tools. This bill is a slap in their faces.

That said, I do not believe that the transition to cleaner tools should fall solely on the landscaping industry. I have done quite a bit of research on this issue myself, and it is simply a fact that cleaner, quieter commercial landscaping equipment that is sufficient for the job exists and is constantly improving. This is evidenced in part by the existence of all-electric commercial landscaping companies who do just fine, including one, Eco-Quiet Lawn Care, which just this past fall expanded its business into the state. Eco-quiet has been around for over a decade.

And to those who say that electric landscaping will make it harder to achieve the lawn aesthetic of the Augusta National Golf Course, so be it. People's health and well-being is simply more important.

At the same time, I understand and respect that, for landscapers already operating on a gas-based model, especially smaller firms, a transition to electric tools poses real logistical and economic challenges. That's why I strongly support state and local measures to help these businesses navigate the shift. The state must listen to landscapers' concerns and challenges, and craft policies informed by their economic realities. No transition is possible without a level playing field for business, something that only the state can facilitate. But it must do so while taking the position that the move to cleaner tools is non-negotiable, and while resisting ill-informed, bad-faith talking points.

I also ask you and other state legislators to consider that landscaping is only one part of our economy that deserves consideration. Why aren't we also talking about the degree to which other kinds of workers are harmed by this activity? Many workers who think, write, or teach for a living, for example—myself included—find their labor constantly interrupted by these tools. Moreover, people trying to enjoy our cities and towns by shopping or being outside are also negatively impacted.

In short, this is a bill that pessimistically tries to portray affordability goals as incompatible with a cleaner world when in fact, the opposite is true. To promote the false choice between affordability and the environment and public health that is embodied in this bill would be a step backwards, and an act of political cowardice—bad for communities, bad for workers, bad for the environment, bad for the climate, bad for the economy, and bad for Rhode Island.

I urge you to vote a firm no on H 7150.

Respectfully,

Allison Lifton