

March 8, 2021

**RE: H 5415 “Designating the Northern Star Coral as the Official State Coral”**

Dear Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi and Committee Members,

As a proud Rhode Islander and president of Roger Williams University, I am writing to express my support for designating the Northern Star Coral as the official state coral of Rhode Island.

Granting this state coral designation is an opportunity for Rhode Island to put our own distinct “stamp” on this rapidly growing area of research. RWU Professor Koty Sharp has been leading research into the Northern Star Coral, studying this hearty denizen of our local waters for its unique characteristics, strength and resilience. This important work can inform our understanding of climate science and what makes certain organisms better equipped to withstand severe weather fluctuations and ecosystem change.

Rhode Island has a long history of leadership in academic innovation, education, and outreach. It is a fitting attribution for the Ocean State to name an official state coral and leverage it as an emblem for research, conservation, and education. This symbolic initiative will spur collaborations among scientists, educators, and institutions throughout the state and nationwide.

As former director of the Boston Museum of Science, I played a key role in bringing STEM education into K-12 schools throughout Massachusetts. In granting the Northern Star Coral status as a state emblem of Rhode Island, I see the potential for sharing the innovative academic

research conducted by our universities with schoolchildren across our state, and bringing awareness into K-12 schools of the issues in our local ecosystems and climate and ocean literacy to our students.

This research comes at a critical moment for our oceans. Worldwide, reefs are being decimated by massive outbreaks of coral bleaching caused by climate change and ocean warming. Now, more than ever, scientists are looking to non-tropical corals as models so that we may learn all we can in order to conserve and protect our quickly disappearing and treasured natural resources.

On March 5, 2021, the Boston Globe published a story about the effort to create a state coral designation and the myriad research opportunities offered by our local coral:

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/03/05/metro/making-push-rhode-island-state-coral/>.

RWU is committed to being a leader in coastal resiliency, and research on our local coral is a critical aspect for our academic research agenda and for our efforts toward protecting our oceans.

I hope you join me in supporting the passage of an official state designation for the Northern State Coral and see this as a tangible statement for the Ocean State to show its dedication to our vital ocean and coastal environment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ioannis Miaoulis', written in a cursive style.

Ioannis Miaoulis  
President