

March 26, 2024
Narragansett, RI

Good afternoon,

My name is Kiersten Sundell and I am a Rhode Island resident and student attending the University of Rhode Island, affiliated with Student Action for Sustainability. We are a grassroots environmental group advocating for youth participation in sustainable actions on the campus, local, and state levels. I fully support HB7585, an act that would remove the requirement that nuclear plant projects must seek approval from the general assembly for the construction of said nuclear plant.

Nuclear energy is our largest source of carbon-free electricity in the U.S., operating at full capacity 93% of the time. This reliability is unmatched by any other energy source, fossil or renewable, as the capacity factors of wind and solar are around 35% and 25%, respectively. Nuclear power is among the safest forms of energy available, alongside wind, solar, and hydropower, with a rate of deaths per terawatt hour that is 99.6% lower than coal, natural gas, or oil.

Rhode Island has set ambitious climate goals and emissions reduction targets to combat the urgent threat of climate change. It is the first state in the country to commit to 100 percent renewable energy by 2033, which is by far the most aggressive renewable energy standard among any U.S. state. As the state strives to reduce emissions economically, it is crucial to explore all viable options of clean energy, especially nuclear power.

Rhode Island is the smallest state in the country and is the second most densely populated. We do not have abundant space to site wind farms and solar fields, and additional fossil fuel production is not an ethical option in light of the environmental justice crisis that has unfolded in Providence due to excessive carbon emissions from gas plants, manufacturing facilities, and liquified natural gas refineries. Nuclear power requires less land than any other energy source at just one square mile on average, which is equivalent to $0.3\text{m}^2/\text{MWh}$. For comparison, wind requires $99\text{m}^2/\text{MWh}$, while solar requires $19\text{m}^2/\text{MWh}$. Although the state largely plans to purchase renewable energy credits to meet targets, local clean energy buildouts will boost the economy and allow Rhode Islanders to experience better air quality.

HB7585 would lift the ban on new nuclear power buildouts in the state, providing more possibilities for the state's energy sources. Numerous leading climate scientists, including those from the IPCC, have stated that nuclear power is a key part of an effective emissions reduction strategy to keep global climate warming below 2 degrees Celsius. As the state looks to decarbonize, we must keep all low and zero-carbon energy options on the table, especially nuclear power, which is why I urge the committee to support HB7585.

Sincerely,
Kiersten Sundell