Beth Cotter

From: Wesley Smith <user@votervoice.net>
Sent: Sunday, January 16, 2022 10:16 PM
To: Beth Cotter
Subject: Reform CRMC

Dear Ms. Cotter,

I'm writing to express my support for reforming R.I.'s Coastal Resources Management Council. Their work is critically important to all Rhode Islanders, and I'm asking you to consider the following actions:

1. Abolish the Council: CRMC's decisions can shape R.I.'s coast for decades to come. But some of those with the power to make these decisions (like the politically-appointed members of the Council) are not required to have any expertise or background on coastal issues. Abolishing the current council structure is the biggest step we can take toward reducing political influence within the agency, strengthening accountability and building public trust.

2. Hire a Dedicated Staff Attorney: CRMC, like other state agencies, should have its own in-house, full-time attorney with environmental expertise to represent staff at hearings. Currently, the staff does not have an attorney at hearings and the Council hires private attorneys who have other clients and potential conflicts of interest.

3. Appoint Hearing Officers: Rhode Island law says that the Governor is responsible for appointing qualified hearing officers to determine contested cases before CRMC-but these roles are currently vacant, leaving the politically-appointed council with the power to rule on controversial and contested cases.

4. Increase Staff and Funding: CRMC is responsible for managing new challenges like offshore wind and climate change, ensuring access to the shore for all, and enforcing the laws and rules that protect Rhode Island's coast-but they only have 30 staff members. The agency needs more resources and staff now.

Given the importance of Rhode Island's coastal resources to the economy and quality of life in the state, the General Assembly should act quickly to make these reforms.

Please consider my email part of the official record for the House CRMC Study Commission. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Wesley Smith
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