

April 7, 2026

The Honorable Robert Britto
Chairman, Senate Commerce Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, Rhode Island 02908

RE: S-2429 – Relating to Public Utilities & Carriers – Customer Service Facilities

Dear Chairman Britto:

On behalf of Rhode Island Energy, I write in **opposition** to S-2429, which would require public utilities to maintain physical customer service facilities within the state. **This legislation would raise costs for local utility customers by necessitating investments in new physical infrastructure to provide services already available to our customers.**

Rhode Island Energy provides essential energy services to more than 770,000 customers across the state through the delivery of electricity or natural gas. Our team of 1,300+ union and non-union employees is dedicated to helping Rhode Island customers and communities thrive, while supporting the transition to a cleaner energy future in a safe, reliable, and affordable manner.

A statutory mandate to construct physical service facilities providing payment and other customer services already available in the marketplace today would result in costly capital investments and higher utility bills. The associated rate impacts on our consumers would exceed any potential savings for the small fraction of customers that make in-person payments today.

Rhode Island Energy appreciates the concerns underlying the proposed legislation, namely, ensuring that utility customers have accessible methods to pay their bills and avenues to address other service needs. That is why **our company provides a suite of customer service resources designed to meet this charge while balancing cost impacts.** Existing customer service resources include:

- **a full complement of experienced customer service representatives** available to answer Rhode Island customer inquiries covering a wide range of topics, such as safety and outages; account information; eligibility for discount rates; arrears management; support for customers facing financial, illness, or other hardships; and billing and payment plans;
- **a Customer Advocate department that specializes in various payment assistance programs** and helps identify solutions for customers who need assistance managing their energy bills;
- **multiple bill payment methods that offer optionality and convenience for our customers, including the ability for customers to pay in cash at hundreds of on-site payment locations.** Rhode Island Energy is also in the process of expanding its payment methods to include widely accessible electronic options, such as PayPal, Venmo, Google Pay, and Apple Pay;
- **Customer Assistance Expos and community events** that provide an opportunity to meet with company representatives and review payment assistance programs; and
- **support services provided by Local Community Action Program (CAP) agencies**, which serve as a valuable resource for customers looking to discuss their utility assistance needs, including access to LIHEAP, energy efficiency, and other programs.

Specific to utility bill payments, **Rhode Island Energy provides its customers with several ways to pay their energy bills – whether online, by phone, by mail, or in person.** This includes customer payments made using a checking or savings account or by a debit/credit card. Payments can be scheduled automatically (from a bank account) or by using a bank website, where offered. We also maintain pay-by phone and pay-by-mail options. And, as noted, we are actively testing other payment methods not previously utilized, including PayPal, Venmo, Google Pay and Apple Pay.

Customers can also pay their utility bills in cash. Our company maintains a relationship with Western Union providing access to ~300 on-site payment locations across Rhode Island at pharmacies, supermarkets, and retail stores.¹ The provision of these various payment methods offers optionality and convenience for customers in a manner that balances costs ultimately borne by electric and natural gas ratepayers.

Rhode Island Energy also holds Customer Assistance Expos, Customer Outreach “Pop-Ups,” and other community tabling events throughout the state where our customers can receive one-on-one guidance from knowledgeable customer advocates on a variety of topics. During these in-person events, customer advocates assess which support programs a customer may qualify for, such as discounted utility rates and payment plans. We also partner with government agencies and community organizations to provide a convenient “one-stop shop” of resources. Past events have included representatives from local community action agencies (CAPs), the United Way, Family Services of Rhode Island, the Division of Public Utilities & Carriers, the Good Neighbor Energy Fund, the Department of Human Services (including LIHEAP), and the Rhode Island Food Bank. **We welcome the opportunity to work with local and state elected officials to coordinate future events.**

In closing, Rhode Island Energy appreciates the opportunity to comment on this proposed legislation and respectfully requests that the Committee oppose S-2429.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Respectfully,



Nicholas S. Ucci
Director of Government Affairs

CC: The Honorable Members of the Senate Commerce Committee
The Honorable Frank A. Ciccone, III, Majority Leader, Rhode Island Senate

¹ Like other third-party payment providers operating across the economy, there is a small (fixed) fee assessed for those accessing this service. Rhode Island Energy does not have the ability to control fees or surcharges imposed by non-authorized bill payment centers that may operate in local communities.