



*Distinctive Communities
Powerful Alliance*

March 11, 2025

The Honorable Senator Robert Britto, Chair
Senate Commerce Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: SENATE BILL 2765 – AN ACT RELATING TO PUBLIC PROPERTY AND WORKS -- THE GREEN BUILDINGS ACT

Chair Britto and Honorable Committee Members,

The Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns respectfully submits this testimony to express concern regarding Senate Bill 2765, which proposes the creation and implementation of the Green Buildings Act Commission and associated requirements under the Green Buildings Act. While the League supports the State's goal of promoting sustainable and energy-efficient public buildings, several provisions in this legislation raise significant concerns for municipalities.

The bill's definition of public major facility projects and construction substantially broadens municipal obligations, applying to renovations or improvements affecting as little as twenty percent of public structures or real property. This expansion would require municipalities to ensure compliance with LEED, SITES, or other high-performance green building standards for nearly all major projects, even those of modest scale. By incorporating these requirements directly into the Rhode Island State Building Code, municipal compliance becomes a mandatory condition for permitting, certification, and occupancy, which could significantly increase administrative workload and extend local project timelines.

The creation of a seventeen-member Green Buildings Act Commission, including public and public agency members, adds additional layers of oversight. While consultation and guidance from the Commission and the Department of Administration's State Building Office and the Building Code Commission may be intended to assist municipalities, in practice this could result in additional reporting, procedural review, and approval requirements for municipal projects. Cities and towns have limited staff capacity, and these obligations could divert resources from other essential public services.

Municipalities would also be required to provide detailed reports and information to the Commission for all public major facility projects, including energy benchmarking, greenhouse gas emission reductions, and compliance with evolving high-performance green building standards. While energy efficiency is an important priority, the bill does not currently provide dedicated technical or financial assistance to municipalities, creating potential fiscal and operational challenges. For example, under the Governor's proposed budget (House Budget Bill 7126, Article 3), voluntary energy benchmarking for public buildings over 25,000 square feet is paired with state-provided technical and financial support, a model that the League strongly supports and recommends as a best practice. Programs like this provide a balanced approach that allows municipalities to participate in statewide energy efficiency initiatives without diverting scarce local resources from essential services.

Taken together, the broad applicability of the requirements, mandatory compliance with high-performance building standards, reporting obligations, and oversight from the Commission would place an unintended fiscal and operational burden on municipalities. Staffing, technical expertise, and capital budgets vary across cities and towns, and unfunded mandates could delay critical public facility projects or increase local costs.

The League supports sustainable building practices and recognizes the value of energy efficiency for public buildings. However, we recommend that the legislation include clear guidance and support from the State for municipal compliance, including technical and financial assistance, alignment of benchmarking and reporting requirements with existing state programs, consideration of municipal staffing and fiscal constraints in the timing of compliance mandates, and streamlined processes for municipal engagement with the Green Buildings Act Commission. These steps will help ensure that statewide sustainability goals are achieved in a practical and achievable manner for all Rhode Island cities and towns.

We stand ready to work with the sponsors of Senate Bill 2765 to help amend the legislation in a manner that achieves the State's green building goals while remaining practical and manageable from a municipal standpoint.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our perspective.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Rossi', written in a cursive style.

Randy R. Rossi
Executive Director

Cc: Senate Commerce Committee