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Senate Committee on Environment & Agriculture
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Acadia Center Testimony in Support of Senate Bill No. 2655A, Energy Facility Siting Act

Dear Chair Sosnowski and Members of the Senate Environment & Agriculture Committee:

Acadia Center appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 2655A, *Energy Facility Siting Act*. Acadia Center is a non-profit research and advocacy organization committed to advancing the clean energy future. Acadia Center's work is characterized by reliable information, comprehensive advocacy, and collaborative, innovative problem-solving, including regional and state advocacy on our electric grid in the Northeast.

Senate Bill 2655A would provide commonsense **oversight and reform on transmission approvals happening at the Energy Facilities Siting Board (EFSB)** and require due **consideration of modern, efficient grid-enhancing technologies (GETs) and advanced conductors for transmission infrastructure within the state**. The bill focuses on transmission spending and is a **key tool for energy affordability**.

Background – Transmission spending

New England's peak electricity demand – measured when the region's demand for electricity is higher than any other time of the year – is expected to double in the next quarter century.[1] ISO-New England has estimated that the cost of increasing the capacity of the transmission system to meet that doubled peak will be between $16 billion and $26 billion.[2] Transmission rate approvals are under federal jurisdiction, but transmission power flows are balanced and managed in the New England region by the regional grid operator, ISO-New England. Rhode Islanders pay for transmission on their monthly electric bill, with transmission charges currently accounting for approximately 17% of a typical bill.[3]

The **cost of transmission projects proposed by utilities and transmission owners is dramatically increasing.** The largest share by far of recent investments in transmission infrastructure has been **Asset Condition Projects or ACPs**—projects to repair, upgrade, or replace aging transmission equipment in existing rights of way. Between 2016

[1] "The Energy is About to Shift," Acadia Center and Clean Air Task Force (Dec. 2024), p. 5. https://acadiacenter.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/AC_CATF_EnergyShift_Report_2024_R10-1.pdf
[2] 2050 Transmission Study, ISO New England Inc. (Feb. 2024), p. 16. https://www.iso-ne.com/static-assets/documents/100008/2024_02_14_pac_2050_transmission_study_final.pdf
[3] RI Public Utilities Commission. Notice of Public Hearing on RI Energy rate change, March 2025. https://ripuc.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur841/files/2025-02/RIE-RateChangeNotice-Mar2025.pdf

and 2024, transmission spending on upgrades and rebuilds increased twenty (20) fold, from $58 million to nearly $1.2 billion.[4] As of October 2025, at least $2.8 billion of transmission replacement, rebuild, and expansion projects are under construction[5] - outpacing other types of transmission spending.

Although ISO-New England plays a role in planning the transmission system for our region, **oversight of these billions of dollars of ACP projects can be meager, despite dramatic increases in spending**. The only approval that ACPs require is a PowerPoint presentation in front of a singular ISO-NE committee, consisting largely of fellow transmission owners. There is no precedent for an ACP being withdrawn or meaningfully changed in this cursory ISO-NE approval process to-date. Further, there is an overall lack of cohesion and coordination with other types of transmission improvements that would more holistically benefit the ratepayer.

Oversight of transmission via the EFSB

This raises the question of what can be done at the state level to help address the limited oversight of transmission spending at the regional level, particularly ACPs. Leveraging state siting authority is an approach gaining traction in the Northeast, with laws utilizing this jurisdictional power passing in Massachusetts in 2024 and in Connecticut in 2025. Although transmission is regulated by FERC and reviewed by an ISO-NE committee, **the state can use its power of siting authority** to provide more accountability for certain transmission investments.

In Rhode Island, the Energy Facilities Siting Board or EFSB is tasked with providing oversight on the siting of major energy facilities, including new transmission lines (defined as power lines operating above a voltage of 69 kilovolts (kV)). The EFSB currently does *not* have language in its statute regulating changes made to existing transmission lines; **this legislation, Senate Bill 2655A, expands EFSB's role to include oversight not just for new transmission, but also for the replacement, rebuild or expansion of existing transmission line infrastructure, which would apply to ACPs**.

The language also:

- encourages more regional transmission projects to be presented to the EFSB— projects that are typically more multi-benefit and cost efficient to the ratepayer compared to siloed projects— as well as projects utilizing existing rights of way, already existing corridors, to make transmission projects more efficient;
- reiterates the importance of the Act on Climate, ensuring that applicants consider it in their transmission projects, as well as non-pipeline alternatives in the case of gas projects.

All these changes will bring **more accountability to the transmission system and its investments at the state level**. Acadia Center strongly supports these changes.

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[4] ISO-NE. RSP Project List and the Asset Condition List. https://www.iso-ne.com/system-planning/system-plans-studies/rsp/rsp-project-list-and-the-asset-condition-list

[5] ISO-NE. RSP Project List and the Asset Condition List. https://www.iso-ne.com/system-planning/system-plans-studies/rsp/rsp-project-list-and-the-asset-condition-list

Background – Grid enhancing technologies (GETs) and advanced conductors

GETs and advanced conductors increase the efficiency and capacity of the electric grid through a suite of technologies that include sensors, power flow control devices, analytical software tools, and new composite cores in conductors. Overall, GETs and advanced conductors can maximize the capacity of existing power lines, increase the flow of power, prevent line sag, and offer numerous additional benefits such as enhancing grid reliability during periods of stress. Our transmission system is like the highway system, and GETs are the tools that ensure that traffic runs smoothly. At a time when we need to build more transmission to support the potential doubling of electricity peak demand in New England—from the historical peak demand of 28 gigawatts to 57 gigawatts by 2050[6]—it is **critical to maximize power throughout the existing transmission system** whenever we can, especially for the purposes of cost savings.

It is notable that GETs and advanced conductors can have a **faster deployment** period, especially compared to new transmission construction, which on average takes 10 years. In contrast, GETs take less than 3 to 5 years to deploy on average and at a lower cost and greater value compared to other traditional technologies.[7] Numerous case studies have demonstrated the **significant cost savings, congestion relief, and reliability benefits GETs and advanced conductors provide**. For instance, PPL in Pennsylvania invested only $300,000 in GETs sensors on their lines, and the return on investment was more than $20 million in annual congestion cost savings, as well as $50 million in upfront cost savings.[8] In this time of skyrocketing rates, electricity customers need to know that the build out of our electric grid gives due consideration of **alternatives to new builds**, particularly in the short- to medium-term. Cost-effective GETs and advanced conductors can deliver significant savings for ratepayers.

Incentives for GETs and advanced conductors

Grid-enhancing technologies (GETs) and advanced conductors are technologies that can help tackle the issue of affordability, but they are not being adequately considered in the grid planning process. Due to the **capital bias of investor-owned utilities**, the incentives of utilities do not necessarily align with ratepayers. **Utilities earn more profit on larger capital expenditures**, like towers/poles, wires, and substations. Operational, efficient, often lower-cost alternatives like GETs and advanced conductors are meant to be capital *savings* technologies, and therefore an extra push is needed for the utility to consider them. Without tackling this misalignment in incentives, **potential lower cost capital solutions and/or operational solutions that would benefit ratepayers are left on the table.** This comes at a cost to ratepayers.

Senate Bill 2655A emulates best practices that other states in the Northeast have taken to push for GETs and advanced conductors. While transmission is regulated by FERC and reviewed by an ISO-NE committee, the state's siting jurisdiction has been leveraged across the region to incentivize GETs and advanced conductors on transmission infrastructure. In addition to expanding the EFSB's oversight of transmission infrastructure to include replacement,

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[6] Acadia Center. "The Energy Is About to Shift." Nov. 2024. https://acadiacenter.org/resource/the-energy-is-about-to-shift/

[7] U.S. Department of Energy. "Pathways to Commercial Liftoff: Innovative Grid Deployment." *See Page 5.* 4 Feb. 2025. https://liftoff.energy.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/LIFTOFF_Innovative-Grid-Deployment_Updated-2.5.25.pdf

[8] Joe LaRusso, Jamie Dickerson. "Electrifying Everything Is the Right Way to Go." *CommonWealth Beacon*, 9 Dec. 2023, http://commonwealthbeacon.org/opinion/electrifying-everything-is-the-right-way-to-go/

rebuilds, and expansions of existing transmission lines (ACPs), **this bill also mandates that applicants to the EFSB give due consideration to advanced conductors and GETs, as well as other non-wires or non-pipeline alternatives**.

Overall, **Senate Bill 2655A takes critical steps to establish oversight on behalf of ratepayers on rapidly expanding transmission spending**. The current ISO-NE review process and existing utility business models do not prioritize modern, efficient technologies like GETs and advanced conductors. This bill **ensures that Rhode Island ratepayers are not missing out on the potential cost savings of these technologies on the transmission system**. For this reason, Acadia Center is in strong support of this legislation.

Thank you again for your consideration of Senate Bill 2655A, *Energy Facility Siting Act.* If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

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