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Senator Louis P. DiPalma
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903
sen-dipalma@rilegislature.gov

Re: *Opposition to H 7127; An Act Relating to Making Appropriations for the Support of the State for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2027 – Article 11, Section 10*

Dear Senator DiPalma:

As Business Manager of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local Union 99, I represent over 1000 men and women who provide their skills through our vast network of signatory contractors in the Electrical Industry in the State of Rhode Island and nearby Massachusetts. I would also refer to those I represent, as well as my 300 retirees, as ratepayers for this conversation.

Unfortunately, solutions to any problem are always reduced to political rhetoric and I am sure this problem will be no exception. That always tends to make solutions a bit more challenging.

I have lived in Rhode Island my entire life and for well over 40 years, paid electric bills to the various entities that controlled the only electrical supplier in Rhode Island. I am in the same predicament as every other ratepayer, facing continually increasing utility bills as I have for the last four decades.

I also have the responsibility to keep the men and women I represented in gainful employment. Those same people are also ratepayers and if I felt renewable projects were harming their families, then I would have to step away from the conversation.

Renewable projects have been in peril for over a year now. We have watched the solar incentives deliberately be removed and off shore wind projects shut down with no well thought out intention.

I take a slightly different position than some of my colleagues. I agree, as nearly every scientist does, that climate change is in fact happening. I also agree we have the responsibility to do something about it. Those before us deflated, dropped and stepped on the ball and those who come after us may not have the chance to change anything. Where I stray is the belief that we will be able to be all renewable anytime soon, but I do believe we should be making every effort to do so. I do believe we can be completely clean energy though, in the near future and continue to migrate to all renewable if that is still our best option. Although getting to all renewable world is an honorable goal, it is a difficult reality. I believe in a *check every box* energy policy. I

believe the goal to get to 100% renewable is a noble one as I stated, however it is difficult to say when that could be achieved. Legislation alone cannot make it happen, there must be a continued desire to leave a better world for those who follow after us.

Most Rhode Islanders choose to constantly share information on social media, buy more products on-line, send more pictures of their meal at Applebee's to the cloud and constantly demand better results from technology for just about everything. The power to make that all happen has to come from somewhere, and it needs to come fast. That will not be accomplished with just one method or another, it will be all of them. There will be no choice if we wish to continue doing what we do today.

Any impediment to any energy production is going to prove to be devastating to our way of life. Unfortunately our great state of Rhode Island, famous for its seasons, ocean shores, clean air and water will always face an uphill climb for access to any energy supply from other areas of the nation. That is how Rhode Islanders seem to want it.

We are extremely limited by the amount of Natural Gas supply which feeds the vast majority of our energy consumption. There has been much reluctance to fix that over the decades and that has left us subject to ridiculous price volatility. Staying the course will offer the same results.

Off shore wind and solar are not victims of that volatility. There surely will be times when weather conditions obstruct parts of solar arrays or a rare occasion when it is not windy out on the ocean, but for the most part free wind and free sunlight set the stage for stable cost to generate power. Backing all of that up with reliable storage can change everything.

In this unpredictable time from the Federal Government on what the energy policy might be, we must act on our own to drive the ball down the field.

Article 11, Section 10 of the budget goes beyond impediment, it actually will send us searching for more non-renewable energy sources that we will import into RI to feed our insatiable appetite for power.

Grid Access fees will literally cause the decommissioning of already functioning arrays. That does not impact the employment of those I represent but it will certainly impact the off-takers which are the municipalities, the hospitals, colleges and other non-profits in this state by costing them millions of dollars in increased electricity costs derived from natural gas. The obvious result for future solar projects would also be the death knell of development. I believe it is very important to also understand the developers have already paid a *grid access fee* by another name called an *interconnection fee* when the projects were built. Those fees are not measured in thousands of dollars, they are measured in the many millions of dollars. Why would they be interested in paying twice for the same grid access?

Net Metering credit changes will dramatically change how an off taker is impacted with the cost of their electricity. Currently it is a one to one relationship so they can offset their electric usage in its entirety. Whereas the budget lays out the plan to lock in the rate at July 1, 2026, it will significantly damage the ability of the off takers to realize their commitment to renewable energy and balance their budgets. There is also a significant rollback in the net metering credit value by rolling the date from 2060 back to 2045. The overall value would be reduced in an accelerated fashion that removes the viability of the investment.

I am just a simple electrician, not an accountant or financial expert but I can see the impacts not only to employment and the renewable goals, but also to the volatility of energy costs when we have no control of how the energy gets to the consumer or how much they will pay for it. In doing some surface research I find that in 2015, RI ranked 4th in the nation for electricity costs and solar was barely born here in RI at that time. *Virtual Net Metering* was just a conversation and not even in the law. There were only about 19 megawatts of connected Solar in 2015. Here we are more than 10 years later and we are again at 4th highest rates in the country with over 700 megawatts of connected solar. I am curious how we see any correlation in the two.

In conclusion, I respect the fact that Governor McKee wants to reduce the burden on the ratepayers, but this article, **as written**, will put people out of work who work on renewable installations, harm the municipal and non-profit rate payers and leave the rest of us subject to constantly increasing fees from the utility with no relief in sight. I am certain Governor is simply trying to reduce the rates of the people of Rhode Island but the language in this article is problematic both to those I represent but also to the actual goals to slowing the impacts of the changing climate. I am optimistic this section will become a conversation outside of the budget where those who are in the renewable industry can come to sincere and sustainable solutions with our elected leaders so we can meet our goals in the most cost effective manner possible.

Sincerely,



Joseph L. Walsh, Jr. / Business Manager

Cc:

Committee Members

Jamie Plume / Committee Clerk

Paul Macdonald / IBEW Local 99 Lobbyist

RI AFL-CIO

Climate Jobs RI

BuildRI