

May 19, 2026

Members of the Senate Finance Committee

Dear Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I am writing to urge your support for Senate Bill No. 2248 establishing a Percentage Income Payment Plan (PIPP) for Rhode Island utility customers.

Attached to this testimony is a copy of my May 2 letter to Senate President Val Lawson explaining in greater detail why I support this legislation. In that letter I discuss the growing burden of utility costs on Rhode Islanders already struggling with housing, healthcare, and other essential expenses.

Energy is not a luxury. Electricity and heat are basic necessities for participation in modern society. Yet many Rhode Islanders are increasingly forced into impossible choices between paying utility bills, buying food, obtaining medical care, or paying rent.

The need for relief is particularly urgent given the dramatic increases in energy costs in recent years. At the same time utility profits have risen substantially over the longer term. Senate Bill No. 2248 represents a modest and practical step toward protecting vulnerable Rhode Islanders from utility shutoffs and unmanageable debt.

A Percentage Income Payment Plan recognizes a simple reality: affordability matters. A utility system that prices essential services beyond the reach of many residents is neither equitable nor sustainable.

I respectfully ask the Committee to support Senate Bill No. 2248 and move it, at long last, forward for passage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. P. Nightingale". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Peter Nightingale, Emeritus Professor of Physics

encl: Letter to Senate President Lawson

May 2, 2026

The Honorable Val Lawson  
President of the Rhode Island Senate  
State House  
Providence, RI 02903  
[sen-lawson@rilegislature.gov](mailto:sen-lawson@rilegislature.gov)  
401-222-4901

Dear President Lawson,

I am writing to urge you to bring Senate Bill No. 2248 — the Percentage Income Payment Plan (PIPP) — out of the Senate Finance Committee and to the Senate floor for a vote this session.

Rhode Island is heading into a perfect storm. The moratorium on utility shutoffs ended on May 1. Energy prices have risen dramatically — up to 45% over the past year — imposing a non-negotiable energy price surge on households already at the margin.

Indeed, current fuel prices in Rhode Island illustrate the pressure as of today, May 2, 2026.

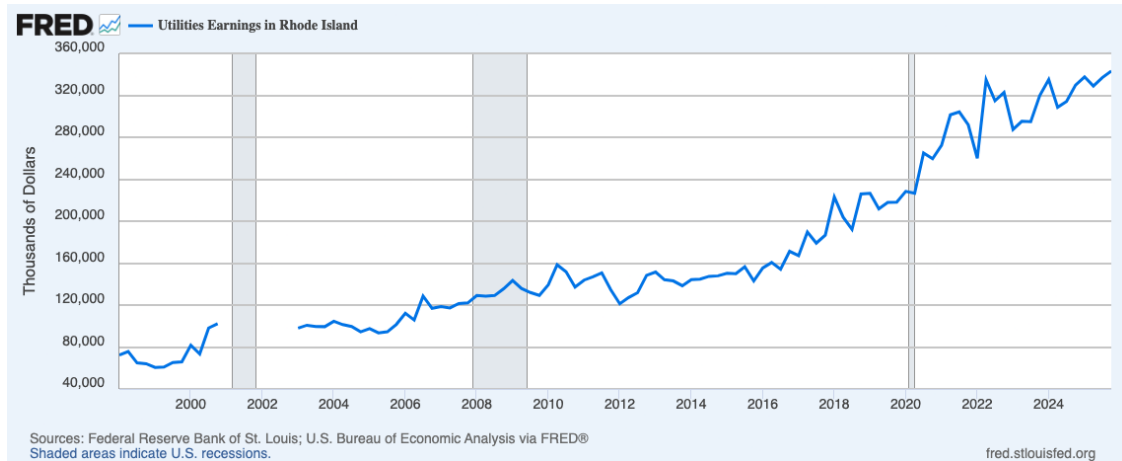
	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$4.34	\$4.99	\$5.39	\$5.70
Yesterday Avg.	\$4.27	\$4.94	\$5.34	\$5.70
Week Ago Avg.	\$4.05	\$4.72	\$5.15	\$5.69
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.91	\$4.59	\$5.00	\$5.74
Year Ago Avg.	\$2.97	\$3.71	\$4.07	\$3.75

Source: [AAA](#)

<https://gasprices.aaa.com/?state=RI>

For households already on the edge, these cost shocks are not theoretical. They translate directly into arrears, crises, and shutoffs — all of them avoidable under PIPP. Energy is a necessity: when its price rises, other essentials are sacrificed — food, healthcare, or rent. The consequences are predictable: chronic stress, homelessness, and premature death.

At the same time, utility profits have surged. The following chart from the Federal Reserve shows roughly a 400% increase over the past 25 years:



Source: Federal Reserve Economic Data (FRED), RIEUTI  
<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/RIEUTI>

This is the context in which shutoffs are likely to accelerate sharply. Rising household costs alongside relentlessly rising utility profits constitute an unjust system — a structural failure.

PIPP is a direct, practical correction. It ties utility payments to income, stabilizes household budgets, and prevents the predictable cycle of arrears and disconnections. It replaces ad hoc crisis management with a rule-based system grounded in ability to pay.

The legislature often speaks of affordability. This bill implements it.

I ask you to act: bring S2248 out of committee, bring it to the floor, and allow the Senate to vote.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Nightingale, Emeritus Professor of Physics