

Testimony in support of Senate Bill 3231, additional \$17.5M in the Green Bond for conservation programs

FROM: Kristin Scharf, Warren, RI

ATTN: Chair of Senate Finance, Chairman Louis DiPalma.

As a fairly new resident (5 yrs) of Warren RI, I have a strong appreciation for the value of the open spaces that we have in RI and the need to work diligently to conserve those spaces. I enjoy biking, hiking, and gardening, therefore I spend time advocating for local, state, and federal government agencies to preserve and improve the open spaces we have to do those activities. There is a critical need for \$17.5 Million in additional conservation funding in the FY 2027 Green Economy Bond, especially \$10 Million for conservation programs. I volunteer with a garden club, a land trust, Audubon, The Nature Conservancy, and local citizen groups in and around Warren to help protect our environment and plan for climate change. I recognize conserved lands as the green infrastructure and natural climate change solutions Rhode Island needs.

I recently saw one of the projects that came to fruition over the past four years at Walker Farm on Hundred Acre Cove in Barrington where two programs from past Green Bond initiatives (RIDEM's Outdoor Recreation Program and the Infrastructure Bank's Municipal Resilience Program) matched investments by the Town of Barrington and the Coastal Resources Management Council and worked with local non-profits who had a vision but needed funding to make it happen. The project at Walker Farm restored habitats that support pollinators and birds, while also absorbing wave energy and filtering stormwater before it enters the bay. In addition, it provided a beautiful place where residents can enjoy coastal access. I am thrilled to see my tax dollars being spent on projects like this.

I urge the committee **to add \$17.5 Million to the Green Bond, especially \$10 Million for the conservation programs below** to ensure that there is funding to conserve important forests, farmlands, and open spaces across Rhode Island.

Local Open Space – \$2M

Provides matching funds to municipalities, land trusts, and conservation organizations to conserve beloved neighborhood green spaces and connect existing protected lands.

State Open Space – \$3M

Protects high-value forests, watersheds, and wildlife corridors—safeguarding drinking water, reducing flood risk, reducing heat effects on communities, and sequestering (storing) carbon emissions.

Outdoor Recreation Grants – \$3M

Helps cities and towns create and improve parks, playgrounds, and trails—expanding opportunities for all communities to enjoy the outdoors closer to home.

Farmland Preservation – \$2M

Keeps working farms in production by purchasing development rights—supporting local food, the agricultural economy, and Rhode Island's rural landscapes.