



Environment Council of Rhode Island 2010 Legislative Priorities

The Environment Council of Rhode Island is a coalition of over 60 Rhode Island organizations as well as individuals whose mission is to serve as an effective voice for developing and advocating policies and laws that protect and enhance the environment.

Clean Transportation Solutions

Funding for Mass Transit. (S2247, S2241, H7497, H7734) These bills are the centerpiece of the legislative package of the Coalition for Transportation Choices. H7734 would create a new trust fund with 35% going to RIPTA for expansion of public transit, 50% going for maintenance of existing roads and bridges (but not building new ones), and 15% to municipalities for street maintenance. Funding would come from a new Petroleum Products Gross Receipts tax and an increase in the biennial auto registration charge. ECRI also supports a study commission on a vehicle miles traveled tax to research incentives for reducing vehicle miles traveled (S2247) and a resolution supporting passage of federal legislation to promote affordable transportation choices, economic development, and walkable, vibrant communities (S2241, H7497).

Support Public Transit. (S2281) ECRI supports legislation to extend the U-Pass program to CCRI, RIC, and URI-Providence.

Global Warming and Clean Energy

Extend Net Metering. (H7713, H7714) This bill would extend the net billing provisions of the net metering law to all the types of renewable energy defined in Rhode Island's Renewable Energy Standard as well as on-site combined heat and power. The bill would also exempt all on-site renewable energy and CHP from "back-up rates"—charges some net metered customers pay whether they use grid electricity or not.

Study risks to Rhode Island from projected climate change, and boost adaptive measures. (S2439, H7719) Rhode Island faces three major types of risks from expected climate change: rising temperatures (putting stress on human health and ecosystems), more extreme weather (thunderstorms, heat waves and hurricanes), and sea level rise. This legislation creates a study commission to study projected impacts and identify methods of adapting, including the protection of vital infrastructure. The bill also proposes four areas of immediate action: improving emergency response and warning systems, incorporating climate projections into comprehensive planning, increasing urban tree canopy and green roofs to reduce heat island effects and stormwater runoff.

Reduce global warming pollution. (S2039) ECRI supports the Rhode Island Energy Independence and Climate Solutions Act that will reduce global warming pollution in Rhode Island 20% by 2020 and 80% by 2050 and will increase jobs and investment in the clean energy economy.

Encourage the use of renewable energy. (H7504, S2522) This bill would encourage the use of renewable energy installations such as rooftop solar panels, residential-scale wind turbines and clotheslines, while discouraging rules and regulations (restrictive covenants) which prohibit their implementation.

Open Spaces

Conservation Easement Defense. (H7247, S2161) This legislation would codify the Attorney General's authority to enforce conservation easements that protect open space lands. It also authorizes judges to award attorney fees if an organization holding the conservation easement needs to enforce the provisions of that easement.

Solid Waste

Oppose Trash Incinerators. ECRI *supports* H7406 to expand the state's ban on incineration. ECRI *opposes* H7307 which overturns the incineration ban and defines incineration as renewable energy. Incineration produces pollution from lead, mercury, and other toxins that lead to asthma and lung disease.

Health

Prevent Mercury Pollution. (H7199, S2353) In 2005, Rhode Island banned the sale of thermostats that contain mercury. However, remaining thermostats in Rhode Island homes contain over 3,600 pounds of toxic mercury. Each mercury thermostat contains 3-5 grams of mercury. A single gram of mercury is toxic enough to contaminate all of the fish in a 20-acre lake. ECRI supports the Mercury Thermostat Pollution Prevention Act (H7199) to require thermostat manufacturers to finance the safe collection and recycling of mercury-containing thermostats.

Stop Diesel Pollution. (S2240, H7850, S2520, H7856) Diesel pollution contains tiny particles of soot that trigger asthma and heart attacks, lead to lung cancer, and also contribute to global warming. Providence County ranks among the worst 6% of all counties in the United States for health impacts from diesel pollution. The General Assembly has already taken action to pass anti-idling legislation and clean up school bus engines. ECRI supports legislation to: 1) require the use of emission control technology in major construction projects (S2240, H7850), and 2) Strengthen the school bus diesel retrofit program (S2520, H7856).

Air Quality and Outdoor Wood Boilers. (H7064) The purpose of this bill is to protect the public health by reducing air pollution caused by outdoor wood-fired hydronic heaters (OWHHs). OWHHs burn wood at a lower temperature than typical wood stoves, causing incomplete combustion and emissions of noxious odors and hazardous substances (fine particulate matter, carbon monoxide, formaldehyde, benzene, aromatic hydrocarbons, etc.). The bill sets emission limits for OWHHs along with requirements for setbacks and stack height. It contains nuisance provisions and seasonal restrictions and would allow municipalities to create more stringent regulations.

Protect children from toxic products used at schools. (H7949) Children need protection because they are vulnerable to toxins and spend many hours each day in school. ECRI supports legislation to promote healthy school environments by requiring green cleaning products.

Funding and Good Government

DEM Natural Resources Re-organization. (S2653) This bill would simplify the divisions that oversee the state's natural resources by merging the Division of Forest Environment with the Division of Fish and Wildlife into a new division, the Division of Forestry, Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Management. In a related move, a Division of Marine Fisheries would be formed. This would greatly simplify public land management activities by providing accountability and clear oversight responsibility, and it would address the reality of greatly reduced staff capacities in these divisions as a result of several years of steep budget cuts.

Support adequate funding for environmental agencies. An ECRI priority is to ensure that the Department of Environmental Management, Coastal Resources Management Council and the Water Resources Board are adequately funded and staffed to enable effective management of our natural resources. ECRI also seeks adequate funding for the Statewide Planning Program to effectively update key state guide plan elements and to oversee the development and implementation of local comprehensive plans.

Include environmental representation on boards and commissions. ECRI calls for quick action on appointments to fill the numerous vacancies currently found on many boards and commissions. ECRI seeks qualified environmental representation on such key boards as the RI Resource Recovery Corporation, RI Public Transit Authority, Narragansett Bay Commission, Renewable Energy Development Fund, Energy Efficiency and Resource Management Council and the Water Resources Board. Any legislation to reconstitute the Coastal Resources Management Council should include appointees with knowledge in a diverse range of coastal interests and be consistent with Separation of Powers (i.e. not limiting the Governor to selecting from lists).