

# ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL OF RHODE ISLAND

## 2023 EMERGING LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

The Environment Council of Rhode Island is a coalition of more than 60 Rhode Island organizations that advocate for policies to protect and enhance the environment. Our policy priorities would address some of Rhode Island's most pressing environmental issues.

*Most recently updated: March 27, 2023*

### **Emerging Top Priorities**

#### **Fund environment and climate action with federal programs and RI budget.**

ECRI urges the Governor, his Administration, and the General Assembly to seek and obtain whatever federal funds are available to address Rhode Island's various environmental needs. We also urge that the *budget* should provide funds for more environmental staff and programs, particularly for implementation of the Act on Climate, environmental justice, and forest conservation.

#### **Climate and Environmental Justice are central to our efforts.**

Fair and meaningful involvement of *all* people in choosing how we use our natural resources *is* justice. It will unite us as we approach a challenging future.

#### **Act on Climate's success is crucial for Rhode Island's Future.**

Changing Rhode Island's energy economy from fossil fuels to renewables is our contribution to fighting climate change. It also frees us from paying \$4 billion a year for our energy from out-of-state and provides a host of new well-paying jobs right here in Rhode Island. We must rise to the challenge!

#### **Long-standing Public Health & Safety Issues Remain Unaddressed.**

Please see the bills listed on the last page of this document.

# Energy and Climate Bills

**Maximize Energy Efficiency:** RI's Act on Climate requires we reduce our carbon emissions to zero by 2050. Plans for doing so are centered on replacing fossil fuel energy with electricity generated by wind and solar power. But we still need lots of energy. We cannot afford to waste any of it. *RI's energy efficiency programs have room for significant improvement.* We must make these investments, which, incidentally, will shrink our electric bills. A win-win example is to replace fluorescent light bulbs with LEDs – They're cheaper, last longer, and use much less electricity. (Ruggerio/Hardy. Passed House in 2022.)

**Solar Siting:** ECRI hopes to see passage of a law that removes incentives for building solar projects in our few remaining forests. Instead, incentives should be used to encourage siting solar "farms" on lands unfit for other use.

**Electric Grid Improvements:** Demand management, energy storage, advanced metering, and time-of-use rates are all needed.

**Building Decarbonization:** RI's buildings produce nearly 40% of our carbon emissions, mostly from homes. To reach zero by 2050, **multiple actions are required, starting now.**

ECRI may support bills that would:

- Incentivize adoption of electric heat pumps and water heaters
- End incentives for gas appliances - Not 'more efficient' AND they still emit carbon!
- End current incentives for new gas hookups.
- Update RI's Building Codes to match required national standards (IBC 2021).
- Create funds that support replacing gas home-heating appliances with alternatives that do not emit carbon pollution.
- Require electric heat (e.g., heat pumps) for newly constructed buildings.
- Eliminate connecting gas for newly constructed buildings.
- Adopt Building Performance Standards requiring large buildings to report energy consumption and make reductions.
- Develop a Renewable Thermal Energy Standard, a performance-based standard that requires fossil fuel providers to deliver increasingly clean heat solutions at a pace that will meet the Act on Climate's goal of zero emissions by 2050.

**Transportation Decarbonization:** Transportation is the single largest contributor to RI’s GHG emissions (40%), and it is still growing. **Again, multiple actions are required.**

ECRI may support bills that would:

- Adopt (for RI) California’s Advanced Clean Car II Standard (ACCII) and Advanced Clean Trucks programs which require manufacturers to provide increasing numbers of electric vehicles.
- Maximize incentives for EV purchasing and EV charging facilities.
- Create a progressively decreasing Carbon Emission Standard for RI transportation.
- Gradually replace all light-duty state and municipal vehicles with EVs, while preventing new purchases of fossil fuel vehicles.
- Fund implementation of the Transit Master Plan and Bicycle Mobility Plan, to reduce RI’s Vehicle Miles Travelled.
- Support low- or no- fee RIPTA rides (currently in trial on the R-line).

## **Environmental and Climate Justice**

**Environmental Justice Act:** It requires the Division of Statewide Planning to define Environmental Justice Focus Areas. They are place-based disadvantaged communities, defined by socio-economic criteria. For such areas, an extensive permitting process by the DEM or CRMC is required for potentially impacting uses.

**Ensuring Environmental Justice in Climate Policy:** We must create an Environmental Justice Advisory Board for the EC4.

**Energy Affordability:** ECRI may support Percentage Income Payment Plan legislation.

## **Water, Toxics, and Waste Legislation**

**Lead Poisoning Prevention Act:** Use federal funds to establish a lead water pipe replacement program for public and private service lines. Require disclosure to tenants and buyers of the presence of lead service lines in such properties.

**Comprehensive PFAS Ban:** PFAS “forever chemicals” are toxic to ecosystems and humans. Once they're in the environment, they never go away. Ban all uses of PFAS in Rhode Island, by the end of 2032 - in carpets, upholstered furniture, textile furnishings, apparel, cosmetics, juvenile products, cookware and firefighting foam, and give the DEM authority to regulate their use.)

### **And more bills related to cleanliness, health, and safety:**

- Create a beverage bottle deposit program (“Bottle Bill”)
- Prohibit ‘Styrofoam’ food containers.
- Ban plastic & small ‘nip’ bottles.
- Prohibit any High-Heat Waste Facilities in RI.
- Extend producer responsibility for disposal and recycling of packaging. Require the producers to help protect our environment.

## **Other Emerging Agenda Items**

**Shoreline Access:** ECRI may support legislation that clarifies and protects Rhode Islanders' "privileges of the shore," as defined in the RI Constitution, while respecting the rights of property owners.

**Just Transition for Labor & Workforce:** ECRI will collaborate with Climate Jobs Rhode Island to secure available federal funds for Green and Blue Economy workforce training. RI must provide support and retraining for RI workers leaving today’s fossil fuel economy. Union training programs and wage protection measures are essential.

**Resilience and Adaptation:** ECRI supports creation and expansion of funding mechanisms for projects that help Rhode Island adapt and become more resilient to the effects of climate change. This may include more funding for the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank and the creation of an annual funding mechanism for the Ocean State Climate Adaptation and Resilience (OSCAR) Fund.

**Energy Efficiency Funds:** ECRI urges maximal use of RI’s Energy Efficiency Funds for rate-payer approved uses. They should be restricted from all other uses.

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For more information, please visit [www.environmentcouncilri.org](http://www.environmentcouncilri.org)  
or reach out to ECRI’s VPs of Policy: [James Crowley](#) & [Peter Trafton](#)

