

March 12, 2025

House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Acadia Center Testimony in Support of House Bill 5493, the Building Decarbonization Act of 2025

Chairperson Bennett and Members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Acadia Center in strong support of House Bill 5493, the Building Decarbonization Act of 2025. Acadia Center is a non-profit research and advocacy organization committed to advancing the clean energy future. Acadia Center's work is characterized by reliable information, comprehensive advocacy, and collaborative, innovative problem-solving.

The Act on Climate requires statewide emissions reductions of 45% below 1990 levels by 2030, 80% by 2040, and net-zero emissions by 2050. Buildings in Rhode Island, solely accounting for residential and commercial heating, are responsible for nearly 30% of our state's greenhouse gas emissions. In 2022, in partnership with DEM, Acadia Center conducted a [high-level state decarbonization analysis](#), modeling policies outlined in the EC4's 2022 Climate Update; it projected that Rhode Island was not fully on track to meet the Act on Climate's 2030 reduction mandate of 45%¹. It is true that the current development of the 2025 Climate Strategy will further refine this modeling to identify the implementation strategies to meet our Act on Climate. However, we also know, without a doubt, that the plan to reduce emissions from buildings will rely on significant energy efficiency (EE) and building electrification. We see these key commonalities across numerous plans, including the [2022 Climate Update](#) and the PUC's recent [Future of Gas Technical Analysis Report](#), and in the decarbonization pathways of neighboring states such as Massachusetts.

This is the fourth year that the Building Decarbonization Act has been introduced. It remains a critical – and all the more urgent – first step towards reducing emissions in the building sector through EE and electrification.

First, the bill proposes benchmarking for large existing buildings, requiring the tracking and reporting of energy usage in large public buildings and then private buildings in two phases. Equipped with a better understanding of their utility bills and energy consumption, building owners can then leverage data to make cost-effective investments that will save them money and reduce their energy usage and thus emissions. Benchmarking is a no-brainer for tackling energy waste and combatting rising energy costs, and is a widespread best practice of governments, institutions, and private companies who manage properties. The Governor's budget proposal this year, House Bill 5076 Article 3 Section 15, funds a full-time employee to ensure the benchmarking of state-owned and -occupied facilities right away – with reporting for calendar year 2025 beginning in 2026. We urge the committee and bill

¹ This analysis assumed a significant expansion ofRIPTA ridership (including full funding for Transit Master Plan implementation) and that 15% of space and water heating in all buildings, both residential and commercial, would be all-electric by 2030.

sponsors to align the reporting for public facilities in the Building Decarbonization Act with this prompt timeline, while maintaining the scope to include municipal and private large buildings.

Acadia Center is confident that the state can roll out benchmarking for public and private buildings at a pace that matches administrative capacity. The state already has a record of benchmarking its own buildings and setting aside funds for cost-effective energy improvements. The City of Providence is leading in implementing benchmarking now, for public and private buildings; a tiered approach has allowed Providence to gradually compile its list of covered buildings and tackle challenges related to data aggregation and software automation with the utility.

Following the collection of baseline data, the bill proposes that the Office of Energy Resources (OER) and the EC4 set a building performance standard to guide these large building owners through setting long-term energy reduction and emissions targets. Performance standards may be met flexibly based on the specific opportunities identified through benchmarking, and may include EE or other building system upgrades. Rhode Island's nation-leading EE programs have demonstrated that the benefits of EE far outweigh the cost of implementation – every dollar invested in EE has resulted in three dollars of benefits for Rhode Islanders. Further, building owners – the state, municipalities, and private companies -- have access to a range of technical assistance and funding options to support the tracking of their energy usage and building performance investments, including through RGGI, the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank, and Rhode Island Energy.

Finally, the bill proposes that the construction of new public and private buildings be electric-ready, a compromise from the original proposal that all new construction statewide be all-electric². While a small proportion of Rhode Island's building stock is new construction, it is critical that this new generation of buildings take advantage of the most energy efficient technologies and lead the way for a fossil fuel free future. This provision of the Building Decarbonization Act simply aligns with and reinforces the state's adoption of the electric-readiness provisions in the 2024 International Energy Conservation Code.

The Building Decarbonization Act is an essential first step to reducing emissions in the building sector in order to meet our state's climate mandates. By tracking energy usage and building performance, large public and private building owners can lower energy costs and chart a path toward investing in EE and electrification. Electric readiness acknowledges that we cannot allow new buildings to lock in fossil fuel systems for decades to come.

Thank you again for your consideration of this important bill to tackle emissions in the building sector. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

Emily Koo
Senior Policy Advocate and Rhode Island Program Director
Acadia Center
ekoo@acadiacenter.org

² A more comprehensive proposal for all-electric new construction now exists in a separate bill as House Bill 5450.