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# Audubon Society of Rhode Island

February 3, 2021

Senator Dawn Euer  
Chair, Senate Committee on Environment & Agriculture  
Rhode Island State House  
Providence, RI 02908

## **Re: Audubon Society of Rhode Island Supports S0078, Act On Climate 2021**

Dear Chairwoman Euer and members of the Senate Committee on Environment & Agriculture,

The Audubon Society of Rhode Island and our 17,000 members thank the Chair for sponsoring this important legislation. We urge you to pass this bill to the floor for a vote.

Audubon was founded in 1897 by people gravely concerned about the unregulated slaughter of birds for their feathers. Today, birds are disappearing from the skies at a rate that shocks ornithologists. Since the 1970s our continent has lost 3 billion birds, nearly 30% of the total. Even common birds like sparrows and blackbirds are in decline due to climate change and other human caused environmental disruptions. What we see happening to birds is also happening to other plant and animal species.

In June of 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, the Audubon Society of Rhode Island 's board approved a new strategic plan for 2020 – 2025. The plan was developed with input from almost 60 key informants including elected officials, environmental colleagues, state and local government, partners, funders and Audubon volunteers. Everyone interviewed for the plan spoke about the urgency of climate change and raised concerns that Rhode Island government is not acting with sufficient urgency. The plan specifically charges Audubon to, "hold RI's regulatory and legislative leadership accountable for implementing plans that support our climate goals." Passing this bill is a critical first step towards that charge.

In 2014, the Rhode Island Legislature passed the Resilient Rhode Island Act which set greenhouse gas reduction goals and formed the Executive Climate Change Coordinating Council (EC4) to ensure that state agencies work together on both mitigation (reducing the state's greenhouse gas emissions) and resiliency (helping the state adapt to climate change impacts like increased storms and sea level rise).

For the past seven years, state agencies have been partnering with the public and private sectors to implement the law. As this work has been unfolding, we have witnessed the increasing impact of climate change on our communities. Rhode Island's coastal cities and towns now experience regular moon (high high) tides that flood low lying roads and homes. Storms are increasingly intense and tornadoes, once practically unknown in the state, are now seen with increasing frequency. There are

15 tornadoes on record for Rhode Island - 2 are in the past year<sup>1</sup>. Action on climate change is urgent and necessary.

This bill, Act On Climate 2021, makes critical adjustments to the Resilient RI Act to increase Rhode Island's efficiency and effectiveness in responding to the climate crisis. It updates the climate targets, making them consistent with current science, requiring net zero emissions by 2050. It creates accountability and transparency by requiring the development of an online public dashboard to track emissions reductions and energy consumption. It makes the state's reductions binding and provides a mechanism for enforcement. And it requires the state to plan for an equitable transition for environmental justice populations.

Act On Climate 2021 builds from our current strengths and relies on current law, the Resilient RI Act. It does not create new state bureaucracy. It is not prescriptive, directing state agencies how to reach the greenhouse gas reduction targets. It allows agencies to utilize their internal expertise and allows them to adjust their greenhouse gas reduction strategies as new tools and information is available. Act On Climate 2021 is not a complex bill -- it is short and to the point and easily understood by decision makers and the public.

We are often asked why Rhode Island, a small state, should take steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The questioners wonder how actions in Rhode Island can have any impact on the global climate crisis. In thinking about this question, it is good to recognize that every one of us has contributed to the greenhouse gas emissions that are resulting in climate change. We use electricity that is generated by burning fossil fuels. We use fossil fuels to heat our homes and drive our cars. Just as we have all contributed to the problem, we each must take responsibility for quickly changing our energy economy. And little Rhode Island must step to the plate along with all the other states and nations on the planet.

Addressing climate change is Audubon's top priority. We stand ready to work with this committee, state agencies and the public on this critical issue.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,



Meg Kerr  
Senior Director of Policy

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<sup>1</sup> <https://turnto10.com/weather/weather-blog/history-of-rhode-island-tornadoes>