

Coastal Resources Management Council Act S.2955

Senate Environment and Agriculture Committee

June 7, 2018

My name is Kristen Ivy Moses and I am the executive director of Rhode Island Interfaith Power & Light, a faith-based response to climate change. As people of faith, we believe we have a moral responsibility to safeguard the well-being of those most vulnerable, people of color and low-income communities. We oppose the proposed changes to this bill.

Last night I emailed each of you some specific information on Environmental Justice Communities in Rhode Island that I wasn't able to share at the committee meeting yesterday. It applies to this bill specifically, as well as your future decisions. In case you haven't had a chance to read it yet, I'll review it here.

Generally, Environmental Justice Communities are communities of concern in terms of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics that have disproportionately high levels of pollution.

In Rhode Island, these communities include South Providence, the Washington Park section of Providence, and certain neighborhoods in Central Falls, southern Narragansett, northern Newport, Warwick, East Providence, and North Kingstown. Note that these neighborhoods don't comprise the whole town or city, only the heavily polluted sections. For example, I live in The Riverside neighborhood of East Providence and my community is not considered an environmental justice community, even though other sections of East Providence are. In general, the term community does not include entire municipalities. The change from community to municipality in this bill will misrepresent the intention of the term coastal communities.

Hispanics and African-Americans comprise the majority of the low-income neighborhoods of South Providence and Washington Park. They already suffer from the highest rates of asthma in the state, brought on by pollution from nearby Interstate 95 and industrial businesses at the Port of Providence. Recently the CRMC made a decision regarding these environmental justice communities.

Since the CRMC makes decisions that impact both coastal communities and environmental justice communities, We encourage you to add specifications in this bill to include members of the public from environmental justice communities in addition to members from coastal communities.

We also suggest that you add a member of the public health care system, who is an expert in the health issues environmental justice communities face, and an environmental expert, who could address the specific climate change and environmental issues the CRMC considers.

By decreasing the overall size of the CRMC from 16 to 10, and decreasing the number of members selected from the public from 3 to 2, you reduce the opportunity for diversity in this committee. By giving the governor complete control over appointing new members, you give one individual a great deal of control over a committee that was previously appointed by three individuals. This will yet again, reduce the opportunity for diversity.

These are not the sort of changes that should be rushed.

RI Island Interfaith Power & Light opposes this bill as written and encourages you to consider our suggestions.
