

May 14, 2019

Senator Anne Gobi, Chair
Representative Smitty Pignatelli, Chair
Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

RE: SUPPORT – H.841 An Act promoting sustainable investment, economic security, and fiscal responsibility with respect to climate risks

Dear Chairs Gobi and Pignatelli,

We are writing to express our support for *H.841 An Act promoting sustainable investment, economic security, and fiscal responsibility with respect to climate risks*, which provides a critically important statutory framework for climate adaptation in the Commonwealth.

Climate change poses a severe and increasing threat to the health and safety of Massachusetts residents and to the economy with increasingly warmer temperatures, intense storms, extreme precipitation events, and rising sea levels. We have the tools to understand and foresee the risks a changing climate pose to our communities but much of our infrastructure is not designed to withstand the foreseeable impacts.

We acknowledge and thank the Baker administration and the Legislature for their leadership on climate adaptation with the enactment of planning, programs, and funding last session. These are all important milestones, but what we need now is the legal teeth to mandate action on these plans and data. The Commonwealth currently lacks a strong statutory framework – consistent, predictable policies, codes, regulations, and standards - to support these climate adaptation activities. H.841 is a critical next step that will allow us to effectively and efficiently move plans into action, better protect our most vulnerable residents, and help avoid costs associated with emergency response and repairs to assets and investments.

H.841 would move the needle on climate adaptation by requiring:

- **Consistency and predictability:** rather than a patchwork of local policies that stretch legal resources, consistent and predictable state policies provide for reliable and stable regulatory approaches to investments and assets. This includes the adoption of a uniform set of data on climate risks, which ensure that everyone is using the same and most up-to-date information to plan for and act on climate risks.

- **Smart investments in safe infrastructure:** the Commonwealth must require consideration and disclosure of the reasonably foreseeable risks of climate change in state licensing and permitting decisions, financing, and capital projects. Investor-owned utility companies must also identify and adapt to climate risks for essential facilities and equipment and consider risks in infrastructure siting decisions.
- **Evaluation of the effectiveness of state building codes:** the Board of Building Regulations and Standards must study the feasibility, impact, economics, and merit of incorporating climate risks into the state building code.
- **Equity:** analysis of and adaptation to climate risks must ensure that those measures do not disproportionately harm or burden our most vulnerable communities, including low-income and minority populations.
- **Education and training:** the state must provide education and training opportunities for members of local boards and commissions—who are often decision makers about development and infrastructure—about the risks of climate change. Having better trained board members will lead to better results.

Climate resilience should not be optional. It should be a minimum requirement for health and safety. Many new roads, buildings, utility equipment, and other infrastructure are still designed and built assuming climate patterns of the past rather than those observed in the present or predicted for the future. We know that climate change will make conditions much worse than the historical data imply. Relying only on that outdated and historical data makes it impossible to adequately address the social, environmental, and fiscal risks facing our communities.

An Act promoting sustainable investment, economic security, and fiscal responsibility with respect to climate risks will not only promote more sustainable investment throughout the Commonwealth, it will help safeguard our economy and increase fiscal responsibility. Taxpayer dollars should not be spent on development and infrastructure that we know is unsafe and unsustainable. For these reasons, we urge you to support H.841.

Sincerely,

Deanna Moran,
Director of Environmental Planning
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