

2015 -- H 5478

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2015

H O U S E R E S O L U T I O N

**CREATING THE RHODE ISLAND HOUSE COMMISSION ON ECONOMIC RISK DUE TO
FLOODING AND SEA RISE**

Introduced By: Representatives Carson, Almeida, Lally, Azzinaro, and Naughton

Date Introduced: February 12, 2015

Referred To: House Environment and Natural Resources

1 WHEREAS, The State of Rhode Island has a long history of taking action to protect its
2 shoreline, its coasts and its economy; and

3 WHEREAS, The Resilient RI legislation passed by the Rhode Island General Assembly
4 in 2014, has signified that climate change will have an impact on the use and enjoyment of the
5 public and private resources of the state and will require new types and levels of effort to secure
6 their preservation, regeneration and restoration; and

7 WHEREAS, The effects of flooding and sea rise are real and measurable in Rhode Island
8 and have been publicly recognized; these include a rising sea level measured 10.6 inches since
9 1930 at the Newport Tide Gauge; thirty percent more intense storms driving worsening floods;
10 measurably longer and hotter summers and heat waves; and increasingly damaging coastal storms
11 and sea surge; and

12 WHEREAS, The State of Rhode Island has valuable public and private assets that sit in
13 the floodplain; and

14 WHEREAS, Rhode Island faces significant economic risks from flooding and sea rise
15 because of its size and its coastal assets, exposure and its intricate web of inland rivers and
16 streams and the effects of climate change that need to be seen in the context of other socio-
17 economic drivers; and

18 WHEREAS, To date, there has been no comprehensive assessment of the economic risks
19 to the Rhode Island economy from flooding and sea rise; and

1 WHEREAS, The clearest and most economically significant of these risks are damage to
2 publicly and privately owned coastal properties, businesses and infrastructure from rising sea
3 levels and increased storm surge, business interruption, property devaluation, lost tax revenue to
4 the municipalities and the state and climate-driven changes on labor productivity and public
5 health; and

6 WHEREAS, Flooding impacts are unusual in that future risks are directly tied to present
7 decisions; and

8 WHEREAS, Marine industries, the real estate industry and tourism are three of Rhode
9 Island's biggest economic drivers and are at risk from sea rise and flooding; and

10 WHEREAS, Rhode Island's business community and the public sector are partners in
11 moving the economy forward and each play an active role in helping to determine how best to
12 react to the risks and costs posed by sea rise and storm surge, and how to set the rules that move
13 Rhode Island forward in a sustainable, affordable direction; now, therefore be it

14 RESOLVED, That the Rhode Island House Commission on Economic Risk Due to
15 Flooding and Sea Rise be and the same is hereby created consisting of eleven (11) members:
16 three (3) of whom shall be members of the Rhode Island House of Representatives, not more than
17 two (2) from the same political party, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House; one of whom
18 shall be from a Rhode Island institution of higher learning with a specialization in economics and
19 risk analysis, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House; one of whom shall be the President of
20 the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, or designee; one of whom shall be a representative
21 of the insurance industry, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House; one of whom shall be the
22 Rhode Island Secretary of Commerce, or designee; one of whom shall be from a Rhode Island
23 Chamber of Commerce, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House; one of whom shall be from
24 the Newport Maritime Alliance, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House; one of whom shall
25 be the Chief Operating Officer of Provoport, or designee; and one of whom shall be the Chairman
26 of the South County Tourism Council, or designee.

27 In lieu of any appointment of a member of the legislature to a permanent advisory
28 commission, a legislative study commission, or any commission created by a General Assembly
29 resolution, the appointing authority may appoint a member of the general public to serve in lieu
30 of a legislator, provided that the majority leader or the minority leader of the political party which
31 is entitled to the appointment consents to the appointment of the member of the general public.

32 The purpose of said commission shall be to make a comprehensive study to assess Rhode
33 Island's financial risk and economic exposure due to flooding and sea rise and report to the
34 General Assembly, including but not limited to:

1 (1) Conduct a study from three case study locations using the Providence Port, the
2 Newport Waterfront and South County tourism and marine industries. Identify and highlight
3 climate risks to the specific business sectors of the Rhode Island economy attributed to the case
4 study locations, and provide actionable data at a geographically granular level for decision-
5 makers;

6 (2) Provide data and information to Rhode Island municipalities, businesses and the
7 investment community so that they may factor sea rise and flooding into their short- and long-
8 term decision making;

9 (3) Forecast and document the economic risks of sea rise and climate change in order to
10 provide information necessary for government, the business community, and the public to prepare
11 to respond to these risks through climate preparedness and mitigation in the case studies;

12 (4) Forecast and document potential lost sales and income, unemployment, delayed sales
13 and income, increased expenses, delay of business plans, potential loss of value and the costs of
14 recovery strategies in the case studies;

15 (5) Conduct risk assessment, identifying vulnerabilities that would make business assets
16 more susceptible to damage from flooding and sea rise. Vulnerabilities include deficiencies in
17 building construction, process systems, security, protection systems and loss prevention programs
18 in the case studies;

19 (6) Project Rhode Island as a leader in the region for taking steps to insure minimal
20 business interruption and loss of value due to sea rise and sea surge; and

21 (7) Make recommendations to the General Assembly for the broad purpose of
22 understanding the scope of the risk in order to take further steps to maintain the value of public
23 and private property and state and private revenue in Rhode Island's economy, to define effective
24 adaptation strategies, to better understand cost inaction; and to propose new approaches to
25 understand and address the business risks associated with sea rise and storm surge.

26 Forthwith upon passage of this resolution, the members of the commission shall meet at
27 the call of the Speaker of the House and organize and shall select a chairperson.

28 Vacancies in said commission shall be filled in like manner as the original appointment.

29 The membership of said commission shall receive no compensation for their services.

30 All departments and agencies of the state, shall furnish such advice and information,
31 documentary and otherwise, to said commission and its agents as is deemed necessary or
32 desirable by the commission to facilitate the purposes of this resolution.

33 The Speaker of the House is hereby authorized and directed to provide suitable quarters
34 for said commission; and be it further

1 RESOLVED, That the commission shall report its findings and recommendations to the
2 House of Representatives no later than January 6, 2016, and said commission shall expire on
3 February 6, 2016.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
HOUSE RESOLUTION
CREATING THE RHODE ISLAND HOUSE COMMISSION ON ECONOMIC RISK DUE TO
FLOODING AND SEA RISE

1 This resolution would create an eleven (11) member special legislative study commission
2 whose purpose it would be to study and make recommendations concerning the economic risks
3 relating to and resulting from sea rise and flooding in Rhode Island, and who would report back
4 to the House of Representatives no later than January 6, 2016, and whose life would expire on
5 February 6, 2016.

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