It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

SECTION 1. Title 42 of the General Laws entitled "STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

CHAPTER 6.3

THE RHODE ISLAND CLIMATE CHANGE AND OCEAN PROTECTION YOUTH EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACT

42-6.3-1. Short title.

This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "The Rhode Island Climate Change and Ocean Protection Youth Education and Workforce Development Act".

42-6.3-2. Definitions.

As used in this chapter:

(1) "Apprenticeship" means a proven model of job preparation that combines paid on-the-job learning with related instruction to progressively increase workers' skill levels and wages. It is an employer-driven model that provides an effective way for employers to recruit, train, and retain highly skilled workers. As an earn and learn strategy, apprenticeship offers job seekers immediate employment that offers advancement along a career path and a nationally recognized credential.

(2) "Blue economy" means an economy built on the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of the ocean ecosystem.
(3) "Climate change education" means nonformal and formal interdisciplinary learning at all age levels about:

(i) Climate change, climate adaptation and mitigation, climate resilience, and climate justice; and

(ii) The effects of climate change, climate adaptation and mitigation, climate resilience, and climate justice on the environmental, energy, social, and economic systems of the United States.

(4) "Climate justice" means the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, culture, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of policies and projects to ensure that each person enjoys the same degree of protection from the adverse effects of climate change.

(5) "Climate literacy" means competence or knowledge of climate change, its causes and impacts, and the technical, scientific, economic, and social dynamics of promising solutions.

(6) "Communities of practice" means a network of practitioners bound by a shared interest and purpose who develop relationships, share ideas, and build knowledge and skills through repeated interactions to advance a domain of professional practice.

(7) "Environmental justice" means the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, culture, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies to ensure that each person enjoys:

(i) The same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards; and

(ii) Equal access to any state agency action on environmental justice issues in order to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, work, and recreate.

(8) "Environmental justice community" means a community with significant representation of communities of color, low-income communities, or tribal and indigenous communities that experiences, or is at risk of experiencing higher or more adverse human health or environmental effects as compared to other communities.

(9) "Green economy" means an economy that results in improved human and economic well-being and social equity by significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.

(10) "Local educational agency" and "state educational agency" have the meanings given those terms in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, 20 U.S.C. 7801.

(11) "Nonformal" means, with respect to learning, out-of-school educational programming carried out by nonprofit organizations and public agencies.

(13) "Ocean literacy" means competence or knowledge of the ocean, its interaction with humans, and the technical, scientific, economic, and social dynamics of ocean protection.

(14) "Ocean protection education" means nonformal and formal interdisciplinary learning at all age levels about:

(i) Ocean life, human interactions with the ocean, the ocean's physical geography, and ocean-related environmental issues; and

(ii) The effects of ocean-related environmental issues on the environmental, energy, social, and economic systems of the United States.

42-6.3-3. Appropriations.

(a) For the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024, there is hereby appropriated, out of money in the treasury not otherwise appropriated the sum of two hundred fifty thousand dollars ($250,000) to implement the grant program provided in § 42-6.3-4; and the state controller is hereby authorized and directed to draw the controller's orders upon the general treasurer for payment of said sum, or so much thereof as may be from time to time required, upon receipt by the general treasurer of properly authenticated vouchers.

(b) For the fiscal year 2025-2026, and each fiscal year thereafter, the general assembly shall annually appropriate a sum as it may deem necessary to carry out the purposes of this chapter, and the state controller is hereby authorized and directed to draw the controller's orders upon the general treasurer for the payment of the sum or sums or so much thereof as may be required from time to time, upon receipt by the general treasurer of properly authenticated vouchers.

42-6.3-4. Grant program.

(a) There is hereby established a grant program to promote and enhance climate change and ocean protection educational programs for youth pursuant to the provisions of this chapter. The director of the department of labor and training, after consultation with the director of the department of environmental management, shall disburse appropriated funds pursuant to § 42-6.3-3 to eligible recipients using a competitive grant process, and establish standards and an application process for the grants, in order to:

(1) Increase capacity at established organizations running climate change and/or ocean protection education programs that will enhance the climate and ocean literacy of Rhode Island youth and workforce by broadening the understanding of climate change and ocean protection, including possible long-term and short-term consequences, disproportionate impacts of those consequences, and potential solutions;
(2) Apply the latest scientific and technological discoveries to provide formal and nonformal learning opportunities to youth, including those of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds; and

(3) Emphasize actionable information and transferrable skills to help young people understand and engage new technologies, programs, and incentives related to climate change, climate adaptation and mitigation, climate resilience, climate justice, environmental justice, and ocean protection.

(b) Eligible recipients shall include:

(1) State educational agencies, in collaboration with local educational agencies and local nonprofit organizations, for the implementation of climate and ocean literacy plans for formal and nonformal climate change and ocean protection education for people ages five (5) through eighteen (18) that:

(i) Are aligned with state education standards;

(ii) Include relevant teacher training and professional development; and

(iii) Include at least one of the following:

(A) Integration of key climate change and ocean protection concepts into state education standards for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), civics and social studies, and other relevant subject areas during the next revision of such standards.

(B) Development of climate change and ocean protection education frameworks and model curricula and curation and dissemination of existing climate change and ocean protection curriculum materials.

(C) Creation of applied learning project-based models, such as models making optimum use of green features improvements to school facilities, such as energy systems, lighting systems, water management, waste management, and school grounds improvements.

(D) Incorporation of climate change mitigation and blue and green economy technologies into new and existing career and technical education career tracks and work-based learning experiences, including development of partnerships with labor organizations, trade organizations, and apprenticeship programs.

(2) Youth development and nonprofit organization programs that engage in community-based climate mitigation and adaptation and ocean protection work that includes a substantive academic enrichment component for youth ages five (5) through eighteen (18).

(3) State-recognized tribal programs that engage in community-based climate mitigation and adaptation and ocean protection work that includes a substantive academic enrichment component for youth ages five (5) through eighteen (18).
42-6.3-5. Department of labor and training - Administration of program.

(a) The director of the department of labor and training, after consultation with the department of environmental management, shall administer the grant program established pursuant to § 42-6.3-4 using a competitive grant process, and establish standards and an application process for the grants.

(b) The director of the department of labor and training shall annually consult with other relevant agencies of state and municipal government, nonprofit organizations, and community-based organizations to determine ways in which grant making pursuant to the provisions of this chapter may enhance and support climate change and ocean protection education, workforce development and training, and environmental justice goals.

(c) The director of the department of labor and training shall direct at least forty percent (40%) percent of all funds appropriated for grants to serve environmental justice communities.

(d) The director of the department of labor and training, with the assistance of the office of post-secondary education, shall establish communities of practice with respect to each of the factors set forth herein.

42-6.3-6. Rules and regulation.

The director of the department of labor and training shall promulgate rules and regulations to implement the provisions of this chapter.

42-6.3-7. Reports.

The director of the department of labor and training shall report annually to the general assembly and the governor no later than December 31 of each year on the status and progress of the program established and administered pursuant to the provisions of this chapter.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.
EXPLANATION

BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

OF

AN ACT

RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- THE RHODE ISLAND CLIMATE CHANGE AND OCEAN PROTECTION YOUTH EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACT

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This act would establish the Rhode Island Climate Change and Ocean Protection Youth Education and Workforce Development Act. For the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024, there would be appropriated two hundred fifty thousand dollars ($250,000) to implement a grant program administered by the department of labor and training to promote climate change and ocean protection educational opportunities for youth ages five (5) through eighteen (18). Additional annual appropriations would be authorized by the general assembly.

This act would take effect upon passage.