A N A C T

RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT - 2021 ACT ON CLIMATE

Introduced By: Representatives Carson, Cortvriend, Blazejewski, Kazarian, Ruggiero, Donovan, Speakman, Knight, McEntee, and Alzate

Date Introduced: February 10, 2021

Referred To: House Environment and Natural Resources

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

SECTION 1. The title of Chapter 42-6.2 of the General Laws entitled “Resilient Rhode Island Act of 2014 - Climate Change Coordinating Council” is hereby amended to read as follows:

CHAPTER 42-6.2

Resilient Rhode Island Act of 2014 - Climate Change Coordinating Council

CHAPTER 42-6.2

2021 ACT ON CLIMATE

SECTION 2. Sections 42-6.2-1, 42-6.2-2, 42-6.2-3, 42-6.2-7 and 42-6.2-8 of the General Laws in Chapter 42-6.2 entitled “Resilient Rhode Island Act of 2014 - Climate Change Coordinating Council” are hereby amended to read as follows:

42-6.2-1. Creation -- Members.

There is hereby established within the executive branch of state government a Rhode Island executive climate change coordinating council (the "council") comprised of officials from state agencies with responsibility and oversight relating to assessing, integrating, and coordinating climate change efforts. The council shall include, but not be limited to, the following members: the director of the department of environmental management; the executive director of the coastal resources management council; the director of the department of administration; the director of the department of transportation; the director of the department of health; the director of the emergency management agency; the commissioner of the office of energy resources; the director of the division of planning; the executive director of the Rhode Island infrastructure bank; the
administrator of the division of public utilities and carriers; the chief executive officer of the Rhode Island public transit authority; and the chief executive officer, secretary of the Rhode Island commerce corporation.

42-6.2-2. Purpose of the council.

(a) The council shall have the following duties:

(1) Assess, integrate, and coordinate climate change efforts throughout state agencies to reduce emissions, strengthen the resilience of communities and infrastructure, and prepare for the effects on climate change, including, but not limited to, coordinating vulnerability assessments throughout state government;

(2)(i) No later than December 31, 2017, December 31, 2025, and every five (5) years thereafter, submit to the governor and general assembly a updated plan, following an opportunity for public comment, that includes strategies, programs, and actions to meet economy-wide enforceable targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions as follows:

(A) Ten percent (10%) below 1990 levels by 2020;

(B) Forty-five percent (45%) below 1990 levels by 2040;

(C) Eighty percent (80%) below 1990 levels by 2050;

(D) Net-zero emissions by 2050.

(ii) The plan shall also include procedures and public metrics for periodic measurement, not less frequently than once every five (5) years, of progress necessary to meet these targets and for evaluating the possibility of meeting higher targets through cost-effective measures.

(iii) The plan shall specifically study the effectiveness of the state and/or multi-state carbon pricing program to incentivize institutions and industry to reduce carbon emissions. The study shall include the effectiveness of allocating revenues generated from such carbon pricing program to fund enhanced incentives to institutions and industry for targeted efficiency measures; projected emissions reductions; economic impact to businesses; any economic benefits to Rhode Island; and impacts to the state's economic competitiveness if the program were implemented.

(iv) If a plan directs an agency to promulgate regulations, then the agency must do so by either issuing an advance notice of proposed rulemaking, as set forth in § 42-35-2.5, no later than six (6) months after the plan is released or by issuing a notice of proposed rulemaking, as set forth in § 42-35-2.7, no later than one year after the plan is released, unless the plan specifies another timeframe for an advance notice of rulemaking or a notice of rulemaking.
(v) The plan shall: include an equitable transition to climate compliance for environmental justice populations, redress past environmental and public health inequities, and include a process where the interests of people from populations most vulnerable to the effects on climate change and at risk of pollution, displacement, energy burden, and cost may provide input on the plan.

(vi) The plan shall identify support for workers during this equitable transition to address inequity in the state by creating quality and family-sustaining clean energy jobs that pay wages and benefits consistent with or that exceed area wage and labor standards. The plans shall provide for the development of programs that directly recruit, train, and retain those underrepresented in the workforce, including women, people of color, indigenous, veterans, formerly incarcerated people, and people living with disabilities.

(3) Advance the state's understanding of the effects on climate change including, but not limited to, sea level rise, coastal and shoreline changes, severe weather events, critical infrastructure vulnerability, food security, and ecosystem, economic, and health impacts, including the effects of carbon pollution on children's health;

(4) Identify strategies to prepare for these effects and communicate them to Rhode Islanders, including strategies that incentivize businesses, institutions, and industry to adapt to climate change;

(5) Work with municipalities to support the development of sustainable and resilient communities;

(6) Identify and leverage federal, state, and private funding opportunities for emission reduction and climate change preparedness and adaption work in Rhode Island;

(7) Advise the governor, the general assembly, and the public on ways to ensure that Rhode Island continues to be a national leader in developing and implementing strategies that effectively address the challenges on climate change;

(8) Work with other New England states to explore areas of mutual interest to achieve common goals; and

(9) Identify and facilitate opportunities to educate the public about climate change and efforts throughout state agencies and municipalities to address climate change.

(b) The council is encouraged to utilize the expertise of Rhode Island universities and colleges in carrying out the duties described in subsection (a) of this section, specifically to ensure that the state's efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change are based on the best available scientific and technical information, and to optimize the contribution by the universities and colleges of their expertise and experience in research, analysis, modeling, mapping, applications to on-the-ground situations, technical assistance, community outreach, and public education.

To support the council’s work, state agencies shall:

(1) Assist the council in implementing the provisions of this chapter;

(2) Develop short- and long-term greenhouse gas emission reduction strategies and track the progress of these strategies;

(3) To lead by example and, to the maximum extent feasible, purchase alternative fuel, hybrid, and electric vehicles that produce lower total emissions of greenhouse gases and develop programs to encourage state employees to reduce their vehicle miles and use sustainable transportation alternatives, including public transit systems;

(4) Implement programs to achieve energy savings in state and municipal buildings to reduce greenhouse gases, reduce expenditures on energy, and stimulate economic and job development;

(5) Increase the deployment of in-state generation of renewable energy and energy efficiency;

(6) Support efforts to expand Rhode Island’s green economy and develop green infrastructure;

(7) Assess the vulnerability of infrastructure and natural systems, including, but not limited to, roads, bridges, dams, and wastewater and drinking water treatment facilities, and riverine and coastal habitats, to impacts on climate change and recommend, implement strategies to protect and adapt these assets;

(8) Work with relevant academic institutions and federal agencies to assess the threats of sea level rise, erosion and storm surge, and communicate these assessments and threats, along with potential tools to address them, to state agencies and affected communities;

(9) Develop plans, policies, and solutions based on the latest science to ensure the state continues to have a vibrant coastal economy, including protection of critical infrastructure, and a vibrant and resilient food system that can provide affordable access to healthy food for all Rhode Islanders;

(10) Develop a climate and health profile report that documents the range of recommendations to reduce health impacts associated with climate change and identifies, protect the most vulnerable populations most vulnerable to the effects on climate change and at risk of pollution, displacement, energy burden, and cost;

(11) Encourage municipalities to incorporate climate change adaptation into local hazard mitigation plans and, when feasible, into hazard mitigation projects; and

(12) Take affirmative steps to eliminate and avoid duplication of effort through consistent
coordination between agencies and programs, and pooling of resources, so as to make the most
cost-efficient use of the state resources and provide the most effective services; and

(13) Foster public transparency by developing public metrics and an online public
dashboard that will track both emissions reductions and sources of energy consumed by the state.
Metrics and the dashboard will be updated at least annually.

42-6.2-7. Reporting.
No later than May 1, 2015, and annually thereafter, the council shall issue a report of its
findings, recommendations, and progress on achieving the purposes and requirements of this
chapter.

42-6.2-8. Powers and duties of state agencies -- Exercise of existing authority.

Consideration of Addressing the impacts on climate change shall be deemed to be within
the powers, and duties, and obligations of all state departments, agencies, commissions, councils,
and instrumentalities, including quasi-public agencies, and each shall be deemed to have and to
exercise among its purposes in the exercise of its existing authority, the purposes set forth in this
chapter pertaining to climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience in so far as
climate change affects the mission, duties, responsibilities, projects, or programs of the entity.
Each agency shall have the authority to promulgate rules and regulations necessary to meet the
greenhouse gas emission reduction mandate established by § 42-6.2-9.

SECTION 3. Chapter 42-6.2 of the General Laws entitled "Resilient Rhode Island Act of
2014 - Climate Change Coordinating Council" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following
sections:


Mandatory targets for emissions reduction:

It is hereby established that the state shall reduce its statewide greenhouse gas emissions
to the targets set forth in § 42-6.2-2(a)(2)(i), as those targets may be from time to time revised, and
that achieving those targets shall be mandatory under the provisions of this chapter. The targets at
the time of the enactment of this act are that greenhouse gas emissions shall be ten percent (10%)
below 1990 levels by 2021, shall be forty-five percent (45%) below 1990 levels by 2030; eighty
percent (80%) below 1990 levels by 2040, and shall be net-zero emissions by 2050.

42-6.2-10. Enforcement.

(a) The provisions of this chapter may be enforced by means of an action in the superior
court seeking either injunctive relief, a declaratory judgment, a writ of mandamus or any
combination thereof. No such action may be commenced without the plaintiff providing written
notice of the violations of this chapter to defendants at least sixty (60) days prior to filing a legal
action in superior court. No such action shall be brought before 2025.
(b) Venue for such actions shall be proper in the superior court of and for Providence county.
(c) All persons shall have standing to commence such enforcement actions.
(d) Reasonable attorneys' fees shall be recoverable by all substantially prevailing plaintiffs who seek relief under this section.

42-6.2-11. Liberal construction.
This chapter, being necessary for the welfare of the state and its inhabitants, shall be liberally construed so as to effectuate its purposes.

42-6.2-12. Severability.
If any clause, sentence, paragraph, section, or part of this chapter shall be adjudged by any court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid, that judgment shall not affect, impair, or invalidate the remainder of the chapter but shall be confined in its operation to the clause, sentence, paragraph, section, or part directly involved in the controversy in which that judgment shall have been rendered.

SECTION 4. This act shall take effect upon passage.
EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT - 2021 ACT ON CLIMATE

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1 This act would establish a statewide greenhouse gas emission reduction mandate.

2 This act would take effect upon passage.

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