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## Acadia Center Testimony in Support of House Bill 5789

Dear Chairman Bennett and Members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 5789 on behalf of Acadia Center, a nonprofit research and advocacy organization dedicated to advancing the clean energy future.

H 5789 makes important amendments to the Rhode Island Energy Resources Act and represents months of collaboration – still underway – among a diverse group of stakeholders. Acadia Center has worked alongside conservation groups, municipal planners, renewable energy developers, farm interests, state agencies and others as part of the Renewable Energy Siting Stakeholder Committee. The committee was convened in August 2017 by the Office of Energy Resources (OER) and the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) to develop smart solar siting strategies in the face of increasing pressures on land in many Rhode Island communities.

This legislation is a critical part of the Stakeholder Committee's consensus-driven work and the effort to balance twin goals: first, accelerating deployment of renewable energy resources to meet the urgent threat of climate change already damaging our state, and second, introducing protections for forest lands and other natural resources that all Rhode Islanders value.

The bill includes a range of strategies designed to drive projects to preferred areas, including previously developed and disturbed parcels. The bill eliminates the ability to co-locate ground-mounted projects on contiguous parcels, which would prohibit the largest, most controversial projects; significantly limits, to 4 MW, the size of solar projects in designated areas of environmental concern; directs the Public Utilities Commission to provide an interconnection reimbursement incentive for solar projects in preferred areas; directs OER to develop an implementation plan for reaching the state's emissions reductions goals that incorporates smart siting priorities; and sets a deadline for municipalities to adopt individually tailored solar siting ordinances that will help local officials review projects and, if desired, establish more streamlined processes for preferred siting.

This bill is not the sole solution to the challenge of solar siting. Small-scale solar capacity in the state's Renewable Energy Growth (REG) program has been nearly doubled to maximize residential and commercial rooftop arrays, which pose no siting conflicts. Further, just this week, OER and the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation opened a \$1 million fund to support projects that propose solar on brownfields.

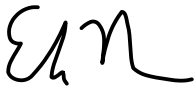
But make no mistake: Without the changes to state renewable energy laws incorporated in H 5789, large-scale ground-mounted solar projects will continue to be built as they are now, driven by economics that currently favor siting in flat, forested tracts. Failure to act this legislative session risks another year without significant protections for forest land and other environmentally sensitive areas. Failure to act this session will almost certainly result in the construction of more large projects on forest land – projects that could be 40 MW or 50 MW and spread over hundreds

of acres. While this legislation does not include a blanket prohibition on solar development in certain areas, it offers reasonable strategies that will do far more to protect these areas overall than if no action is taken at all.

Acadia Center continues to collaborate and negotiate in good faith with members of the Renewable Energy Siting Stakeholder Committee to further refine and improve this legislation. Acadia Center urges the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee to support those efforts and the consensus bill that emerges. Indeed, without the General Assembly's support for this bill, more of the land we all wish to protect will be lost.

Thank you again for your consideration.

Sincerely,



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