

**2026 -- H 8451 SUBSTITUTE A**

=====  
LC006339/SUB A  
=====

**STATE OF RHODE ISLAND**

**IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026**

---

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

**DIRECTING THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT TO WORK  
WITH THE TOWN OF NEW SHOREHAM TO DEVELOP A REGULATORY FRAMEWORK  
TO REDUCE TICK-BORNE ILLNESS ON BLOCK ISLAND**

Introduced By: Representative Tina L. Spears

Date Introduced: April 15, 2026

Referred To: House Environment and Natural Resources

1           WHEREAS, Block Island, comprising the Town of New Shoreham, is a unique island  
2 community in the State of Rhode Island, accessible only by ferry or air, and home to a significant  
3 year-round resident population as well as hundreds of thousands of seasonal visitors and tourists  
4 each year; and

5           WHEREAS, The island's geographic isolation has prevented natural predation or  
6 dispersal that would otherwise regulate deer numbers on the mainland; and

7           WHEREAS, The presence of deer on Block Island has led to correspondingly elevated  
8 populations of ticks, the primary vector for Lyme disease, anaplasmosis, babesiosis, and other  
9 tick-borne illnesses that pose a serious and ongoing public health threat to island residents and  
10 visitors; and

11           WHEREAS, The rates of tick-borne illness infection among residents of New Shoreham  
12 are disproportionately high relative to other communities in Rhode Island, placing a significant  
13 burden on affected individuals, their families, and the healthcare resources available to the island  
14 community; and

15           WHEREAS, Effective management of deer populations has been demonstrated in peer-  
16 reviewed scientific literature and in practice by other island and coastal communities to be one of  
17 the most effective means of reducing the incidence of tick-borne illness in humans; and

18           WHEREAS, The Town of New Shoreham has expressed a need for regulatory tools and  
19 state partnership to address the deer population in a manner that is safe, effective, humane, and

1 consistent with sound wildlife management principles; and

2 WHEREAS, The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) has  
3 authority over wildlife management and the issuance of damage permits, including deer damage  
4 permits, pursuant to the laws of the State of Rhode Island; and

5 WHEREAS, It is in the interest of the health, safety, and welfare of the people of Rhode  
6 Island that the State partner with the Town of New Shoreham to devise a comprehensive,  
7 evidence-based regulatory framework for addressing deer mitigation as a public health  
8 intervention; now, therefore, be it

9 RESOLVED, That this House of Representatives of the State of Rhode Island hereby  
10 directs the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM), in consultation with  
11 the Town of New Shoreham and the Rhode Island Department of Health, to develop a  
12 comprehensive regulatory framework for the management and reduction of deer populations on  
13 Block Island for the purpose of mitigating tick-borne illness; and be it further

14 RESOLVED, That such regulatory framework shall include, at minimum:

15 1. Proposed strategies for the reduction or elimination of tick-borne illness vectors, with  
16 particular focus on deer population management, including but not limited to licensed hunting,  
17 culling programs, fertility control, and exclusion methods appropriate to the island environment;

18 2. A comprehensive public safety plan governing any deer management activities  
19 conducted under the framework, including protocols for coordination with local law enforcement,  
20 notice to residents and visitors, and operational restrictions to ensure public safety;

21 3. A mechanism for the Town of New Shoreham to apply for, and for DEM to issue, a  
22 wildlife damage permit or such other regulatory authorization as may be necessary to carry out  
23 approved deer management activities, notwithstanding any other general restrictions on the  
24 issuance of deer damage permits;

25 4. A method for regularly reporting progress and outcomes to the Department of  
26 Environmental Management, the Department of Health, and the Rhode Island General Assembly;

27 5. An ongoing data collection program to track deer population trends, tick density and  
28 species composition, and rates of tick-borne illness infection among island residents and visitors,  
29 for distribution to the Department of Health and other relevant public health entities; and

30 6. A public education component to inform residents and visitors of tick-borne illness  
31 risks and evidence-based personal prevention measures; and be it further

32 RESOLVED, That the Department of Environmental Management shall submit a report  
33 of its findings, proposed regulatory framework, and recommended legislative or administrative  
34 actions to the Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the President of the

1 Senate no later than six (6) months following the adoption of this resolution; and be it further

2           RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to  
3 transmit duly certified copies of this resolution to the Director of the Rhode Island Department of  
4 Environmental Management, the Director of the Rhode Island Department of Health, and the  
5 Town Council of the Town of New Shoreham.

=====  
LC006339/SUB A  
=====