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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

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A N A C T

RELATING TO PUBLIC UTILITIES AND CARRIERS -- SOLAR COST REDUCTION ACT

Introduced By: Senators Valverde, Mack, Kallman, DiMario, Bissailon, Urso, Gu,
Ujifusa, Ciccone, and Vargas

Date Introduced: March 04, 2026

Referred To: Senate Environment & Agriculture

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 39 of the General Laws entitled "PUBLIC UTILITIES AND
2 CARRIERS" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 36

4 SOLAR COST REDUCTION ACT

5 **39-36-1. Title.**

6 This act shall be known and may be cited as the "Solar Cost Reduction Act."

7 **39-36-2. Definitions.**

8 As used in this chapter, unless the context clearly requires otherwise:

9 (1) "Department" means the Rhode Island office of energy resources, or such other state
10 agency as may be designated by the governor to implement this chapter.

11 (2) "Smart solar permitting platform" means software, or a combination of software, that:

12 (i) Allows contractors and other qualified parties to submit applications electronically, on
13 a twenty-four (24) hour per day, seven (7) day per week basis, for permits to install residential solar
14 energy systems;

15 (ii) Automatically performs code compliance checks and reviews permit applications for
16 compliance with applicable building, electrical, fire, and zoning requirements;

17 (iii) Generates approvals and issues permits or permit revisions instantly, without the need
18 for follow-up manual plan review, for code-compliant applications;

19 (iv) Accepts electronic payments of permitting fees, if such fees are levied; and

1 (v) Issues permits or permit revisions upon receipt of payment.

2 (3) "Eligible small-scale solar energy system" means:

3 (i) A residential solar energy system; or

4 (ii) A solar energy system installed on a property that is served by a residential electric
5 meter, or that otherwise qualifies for expedited or simplified interconnection review by the electric
6 distribution company, regardless of the ownership or use of the property.

7 **39-36-3. Statewide smart solar permitting platform.**

8 (a) The department shall integrate into its existing online statewide permitting platform
9 and/or procure, administer, and maintain a statewide smart solar permitting platform for the
10 permitting of residential solar energy system or other eligible small-scale solar energy system .

11 (b) The smart solar permitting platform shall, at a minimum:

12 (1) Accept electronic permit applications for residential solar energy system or other
13 eligible small-scale solar energy system including, but not limited to, photovoltaic systems, energy
14 storage systems, main electrical panel upgrades, and main breaker derates;

15 (2) Perform automated code compliance checks consistent with applicable state and local
16 codes;

17 (3) Issue permits and permit revisions instantly for code-compliant applications, without
18 requiring follow-up manual plan review;

19 (4) Allow for electronic signatures, stamps, seals, and certifications; and

20 (5) Publish, on a publicly accessible website, all forms, documentation, and instructions
21 required to submit a permit application through the platform.

22 (c) The department shall make the smart solar permitting platform available to
23 municipalities at no cost.

24 (d) The department may assess reasonable fees to contractors, installers, or other
25 professionals using the smart solar permitting platform to defray the costs of procuring,
26 implementing, and administering the platform and complying with this chapter; provided, however,
27 that:

28 (1) All municipal permitting fees shall continue to be retained by the municipality; and

29 (2) The use of the platform shall not alter a municipality's authority to set permit fee
30 amounts.

31 **39-36-4. Municipal participation and equivalency.**

32 (a) Not later than twelve (12) months after the effective date of this chapter, every
33 municipality shall allow applications for residential solar energy systems or other eligible small-
34 scale solar energy systems to be submitted and permits issued instantly through:

1 (1) The statewide smart solar permitting platform; or
2 (2) An alternative automated solar permitting platform that is substantially equivalent to,
3 or better than, the statewide platform.

4 (b) An alternative automated platform shall be deemed substantially equivalent only if it:
5 (1) Performs automated code compliance checks;
6 (2) Issues permits and permit revisions instantly without follow-up manual plan review for
7 code-compliant applications; and
8 (3) Does not require the submission of documentation beyond what is required by the
9 statewide smart solar permitting platform.

10 (c) Rules and regulations governing the submission, review, and approval of permit
11 applications through the statewide smart solar permitting platform shall be applied uniformly across
12 all participating municipalities.

13 **39-36-5. Limitation on manual plan review.**

14 For any residential solar energy system or other eligible small-scale solar energy system
15 for which a permit or permit revision is issued through the smart solar permitting platform or an
16 equivalent automated platform, a municipality shall not require additional manual plan review as a
17 condition of permit issuance.

18 **39-36-6. Engineering documentation thresholds.**

19 (a) For a residential solar energy system or other eligible small-scale solar energy system
20 with a nameplate capacity of twenty-five kilowatts (25 kW) alternating current or less, a
21 municipality or local permitting authority shall not require stamped electrical drawings, engineered
22 plans, or additional engineering documentation as a condition of permit issuance, except where
23 such documentation is expressly required by the applicable state building, electrical, or fire code.

24 (b) For purposes of this section, a residential solar energy system or other eligible small-
25 scale solar energy system shall be deemed eligible under subsection (a) of this section if the system
26 qualifies for expedited or simplified interconnection review by the electric distribution company.

27 (c) Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit the authority of a permitting official
28 to require additional documentation where a system presents documented and site-specific health
29 or safety concerns.

30 **39-36-7. Electronic submissions and form requirements.**

31 (a) Municipalities and state agencies shall accept electronic signatures, documents, and
32 submissions for permit applications processed through the smart solar permitting platform or an
33 equivalent automated platform.

34 (b) A permit application submitted through such a platform shall not be denied, delayed,

1 or deemed incomplete solely due to a failure to comply with a requirement relating to the physical
2 form, format, size, or method of submission of documents.

3 **39-36-8. Centralized repository of municipal solar ordinances.**

4 (a) The department shall establish and maintain a single, publicly accessible online
5 repository containing all municipal ordinances, regulations, and local requirements applicable to
6 the permitting and installation of solar energy systems in the state.

7 (b) Each municipality shall provide the department with current versions of such
8 ordinances and regulations and shall notify the department of any updates in a timely manner.

9 (c) The department shall make the repository available through the smart solar permitting
10 platform or a related state website.

11 **39-36-9. Remote virtual inspections.**

12 (a)(1) By July 1, 2027, a city or town shall offer homeowners the option of requesting
13 remote inspections, with the inspection conducted off site, for all or a subset of the inspections
14 required for the following building permits in one and two (2) family dwelling units:

15 (i) Photovoltaic and energy storage systems;

16 (ii) Residential electrical minor work including all of the following:

17 (A) Main and sub service panels;

18 (B) Rewire work; and

19 (C) New electrical circuit.

20 (2) Remote inspections shall be conducted primarily through the submission of recorded
21 photographs and videos demonstrating compliance with applicable code requirements.

22 (3) A city or town may, but shall not be required to, offer live video conferencing as an
23 optional inspection method, and shall not require the use of live video conferencing as a condition
24 of offering or completing a remote inspection.

25 (b) A city or town shall keep a digital record of the remote inspections for a reasonable
26 period of time for later review, training, or compliance.

27 (c) A city or town may, at their discretion, set up a process to:

28 (1) Perform occasional on-site audits to confirm that a homeowner and/or a contractor is
29 accurately representing the work that is the subject of a remote inspection.

30 (2) If a homeowner and/or a contractor is found to have willfully misrepresented the work
31 that is the subject of a remote inspection, temporarily ban that homeowner and/or contractor from
32 using remote inspections and enter into agreements with other cities and towns to enforce each
33 other's temporary remote inspections bans for homeowners and/or contractors who have been found
34 to willfully misrepresent the work.

1 (d) A city or town shall offer remote inspections at no greater cost and with no greater
2 delay than in-person inspections.

3 (e) All liabilities and immunities including, but not limited to, the immunities provided to
4 all municipalities and the state, shall apply to any inspections conducted remotely.

5 **39-36-10. Final inspections.**

6 (a) For any residential solar energy system or other eligible small-scale solar energy system
7 including, but not limited to, energy storage systems, electrical panel upgrades, or main breaker
8 derates, that is permitted pursuant to this chapter or through a state-approved automated smart solar
9 permitting platform, a municipality or local permitting authority shall require no more than one
10 final inspection as a condition of final approval.

11 (1) If a remote inspection conducted pursuant to § 39-36-9 for a solar installation fails, a
12 building inspector may, at their discretion, conduct future inspections regarding that building
13 permit remotely or in person.

14 (2) An additional inspection may be required only if the system fails the initial inspection;
15 provided that, the permitting authority issues a written notice identifying the specific deficiencies
16 that resulted in the failure.

17 (3) Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit the authority of a permitting official
18 to conduct an inspection necessary to address documented health or safety violations discovered
19 during the initial inspection.

20 (b) A municipality or local permitting authority shall schedule and conduct a final
21 inspection within five (5) business days of a request.

22 (c) If the inspection is not conducted within such timeframe, the permitting authority shall
23 provide written notice explaining the reason for the delay and the expected date of inspection.

24 **39-36-11. Reports to office of energy resources.**

25 (a) By July 1, 2027, and annually thereafter, jurisdictions shall provide a report to the office
26 of energy resources that confirms that they have implemented a remote inspection program in
27 compliance with this chapter, and reports the number of inspections for different types of permits
28 that are done remotely and in person, and the failure rates of each inspection. The office of energy
29 resources shall develop standards for the reports, and shall post the reports to its internet website.

30 (b) By July 1, 2027, and annually thereafter, for jurisdictions that have implemented
31 equivalent automated permitting platforms in lieu of using the state's permitting platform,
32 jurisdictions shall provide a report to the office of energy resources that confirms its compliance
33 with this chapter, and reports the number of permits issued and the failure rates of permit
34 applications. The office of energy resources shall develop standards for the reports, and shall post

1 the reports to its website.

2 (c) The office of energy resources may request information from a jurisdiction in order to
3 assess whether a jurisdiction is in compliance with this chapter, post compliance information on its
4 website, and take appropriate enforcement action to ensure compliance.

5 **39-36-12. Electric distribution companies.**

6 (a) An electric distribution company shall not require any inspection, verification, or
7 approval in addition to the inspection performed by the municipal or local permitting authority as
8 a condition of granting permission to operate a residential solar energy system or other eligible
9 small-scale solar energy system or energy storage system.

10 (b) Upon receipt of documentation demonstrating that the system has passed the required
11 municipal inspection and satisfies applicable interconnection requirements, the electric distribution
12 company shall grant permission to operate without unreasonable delay.

13 (c) For purposes of this subsection, an electric distribution company shall be deemed to
14 have acted with unreasonable delay if it fails to grant permission to operate within a timeframe
15 consistent with its applicable expedited or simplified interconnection procedures, absent a
16 documented technical or safety issue.

17 (d) Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit an electric distribution company's
18 authority to perform activities necessary to ensure system synchronization, meter installation, or
19 compliance with approved interconnection standards; provided that, such activities do not require
20 an additional customer-side inspection.

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

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO PUBLIC UTILITIES AND CARRIERS -- SOLAR COST REDUCTION ACT

1 This act would modernize the state’s existing online E-Permitting Portal by requiring
2 automated plan review and instant permits issuance for residential solar energy systems or other
3 eligible small-scale solar energy systems that meet all safety and building codes. It would also
4 authorize remote virtual inspections as a valid practice for typical rooftop residential installations
5 in an effort to reduce administrative costs for Rhode Island’s municipalities, businesses, and
6 consumers.

7 This act would take effect upon passage.

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