

2026 -- S 3181

LC006244

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO THE BLUE WAVE BOND FOR COASTAL PREPAREDNESS -- 2026 BOND REFERENDUM

Introduced By: Senators DiPalma, Gu, Felag, Sosnowski, Tikoian, Ciccone, and Thompson

Date Introduced: April 03, 2026

Referred To: Senate Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Short title.

2 This act shall be known and may be cited as the "Blue Wave Bond for Coastal Preparedness
3 Act."

4 SECTION 2. Legislative findings and purpose. The general assembly finds that Rhode
5 Island faces increasing risks from sea level rise, coastal erosion, storm surge, extreme precipitation,
6 chronic flooding, and other climate-related hazards, which threaten public safety, public
7 infrastructure, housing, environmental resources, and the state's economy.

8 The purpose of this act is to authorize the issuance of general obligation bonds to fund
9 coastal preparedness and resilience projects that protect Rhode Island's communities, critical
10 facilities, and natural systems, while also supporting workforce readiness to plan, design, construct,
11 and maintain climate-resilient infrastructure.

12 SECTION 3. Authorization of general obligation bonds. For the purpose of financing
13 coastal preparedness, resilience infrastructure, and workforce development projects as set forth in
14 this act, the State of Rhode Island is authorized to issue general obligation bonds in a principal
15 amount not to exceed one hundred million dollars (\$100,000,000). The bonds shall be issued in
16 such amounts and at such times as the governor and the general treasurer determine, and shall bear
17 interest and mature in accordance with applicable provisions of Rhode Island law.

18 SECTION 4. Use of proceeds - Eligible project types. Bond proceeds shall be used only

1 for capital projects and related planning, design, engineering, permitting, acquisition, and
2 construction costs that directly increase resilience to climate hazards. In addition, all eligible
3 projects funded in whole or in part by funds from the Blue Wave Bond for Coastal Preparedness
4 shall adhere to the requirements and obligations of chapter 13 of title 37 ("labor and payment of
5 debts of contractors"), which require all relevant contractors and subcontractors performing work
6 on blue economy bond projects to pay their employees in compliance with the provisions of R.I.
7 Gen. Laws § 37-13-7.

8 Eligible project types shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

9 (a) Coastal and shoreline protection. Projects to reduce damage from coastal flooding,
10 storm surge, and erosion, including:

- 11 (1) Living shoreline installations and restoration;
- 12 (2) Dune construction, dune restoration, and beach nourishment;
- 13 (3) Salt marsh restoration and migration corridors;
- 14 (4) Coastal buffer acquisition and conservation easements;
- 15 (5) Nature-based wave attenuation systems; and
- 16 (6) Shoreline stabilization where nature-based methods are not feasible.

17 (b) Stormwater and Flood Mitigation Infrastructure. Projects to manage extreme rainfall
18 and reduce inland flooding, including:

- 19 (1) Expansion or replacement of stormwater drainage systems;
- 20 (2) Culvert upsizing and replacement to meet future rainfall conditions;
- 21 (3) Flood storage systems, detention basins, and green bank retrofits;
- 22 (4) Permeable pavement and impervious surface removal projects;
- 23 (5) Municipal stormwater system mapping and hydraulic modeling; and
- 24 (6) Flood mitigation retrofits for high-risk neighborhoods and commercial districts.

25 (c) Wastewater and drinking water system resilience. Projects to protect water quality and
26 essential services, including:

- 27 (1) Floodproofing wastewater treatment plants and pump stations;
- 28 (2) Relocation or elevation of critical equipment in wastewater facilities;
- 29 (3) Wet weather storage and overflow reduction systems;
- 30 (4) Drinking water infrastructure hardening, redundancy, and backup power;
- 31 (5) Protection of wellheads, reservoirs, and drinking water intakes; and
- 32 (6) Infrastructure improvements that prevent sewage releases during storms.

33 (d) Transportation and evacuation route resilience. Projects to maintain emergency access
34 and mobility during flooding events, including:

- 1 (1) Elevation of roads and bridges in flood-prone areas;
 - 2 (2) Flood barrier systems protecting key transportation corridors;
 - 3 (3) Roadway berm construction to reduce inundation;
 - 4 (4) Engineering and planning for managed retreat or rerouting of roadways; and
 - 5 (5) Resilient transit infrastructure improvements that support evacuation planning.
- 6 (e) Energy and critical infrastructure hardening. Projects that protect essential lifeline
- 7 systems, including:
- 8 (1) Microgrids and backup power systems for critical facilities;
 - 9 (2) Hardening of substations and power distribution equipment;
 - 10 (3) Targeted undergrounding of vulnerable transmission and distribution lines;
 - 11 (4) Infrastructure redundancy to reduce outage risk in coastal communities; and
 - 12 (5) Protection of communications infrastructure and emergency systems.
- 13 (f) Port, harbor, and working waterfront resilience. Projects to protect Rhode Island's
- 14 coastal economy and supply chains, including:
- 15 (1) Bulkhead elevation and reinforcement;
 - 16 (2) Flood barrier systems for ports and waterfront industrial zones;
 - 17 (3) Storm surge mitigation infrastructure at marinas and port facilities;
 - 18 (4) Shoreline protection for shipyards, fisheries, and waterfront businesses; and
 - 19 (5) Backup power and resilience upgrades to maintain port operations during outages.
- 20 (g) Public facilities and community resilience hubs. Projects that protect public health and
- 21 safety, including:
- 22 (1) Floodproofing of public safety buildings, schools, shelters, and community centers;
 - 23 (2) Creation and retrofitting of resilience hubs with emergency power and supplies;
 - 24 (3) Protection of emergency medical services and hospital-adjacent infrastructure; and
 - 25 (4) Relocation of critical community services out of flood hazard zones.
- 26 (h) Workforce preparedness and training. Projects and programs that develop Rhode
- 27 Island's climate resilience workforce, including:
- 28 (1) Workforce training programs for construction, engineering, green infrastructure,
 - 29 maritime, and coastal restoration;
 - 30 (2) Credentialing and apprenticeship programs related to resilience construction trades;
 - 31 (3) Partnerships with community colleges, technical schools, unions, and workforce
 - 32 boards;
 - 33 (4) Training for municipal and state staff in climate-resilient planning, design
 - 34 standards, and project implementation; and

1 (5) Development of a statewide resilience workforce pipeline, including recruitment
2 and career pathways.
3 Funds under this subsection may be used for training facilities, program development, equipment
4 purchases, and grants to qualified training providers; provided that, expenditures are directly related
5 to implementation of climate resilience and coastal preparedness projects.

6 **SECTION 5. Project eligibility - Priority areas - Ten (10) year implementation**
7 **requirement.**

8 (a) Legislative intent.

9 It is the intent of the general assembly that bond proceeds authorized by this act shall be
10 used exclusively for projects that address the most urgent and high-risk climate resilience needs
11 identified by the State of Rhode Island for the upcoming decade.

12 (b) Definitions.

13 As used in this act, the following terms shall have the following meanings:

14 (1) "Administering agency" means the governor's office or such state agency or agencies
15 designated by the governor or by law to implement the provisions of this act including, but not
16 limited to, the Rhode Island infrastructure bank, the department of environmental management ,
17 the coastal resources management council , the department of transportation, or any successor
18 agencies.

19 (2) "Eligible project" means a capital improvement, natural infrastructure project,
20 resilience retrofit, acquisition, engineering design, permitting activity, or workforce preparedness
21 investment that is authorized under this act and meets the requirements of this section.

22 (3) "High-risk area" means any geographic area within the State of Rhode Island that is
23 identified in the resilience report, or through mapping and analysis incorporated into the resilience
24 report, as subject to significant current or projected vulnerability to climate impacts including, but
25 not limited to, sea level rise, coastal flooding, storm surge, coastal erosion, riverine flooding,
26 extreme precipitation, heat impacts, repetitive loss flooding, or critical infrastructure exposure.

27 (4) "Prioritized area" means any geographic area, municipality, neighborhood, watershed,
28 coastal zone, port district, transportation corridor, or critical infrastructure service area identified
29 in the resilience report as a focus area for near-term or medium-term resilience investment.

30 (5) "Resilience Report" means the State of Rhode Island's most recently adopted statewide
31 climate resilience strategy or resilience planning document including, but not limited to, the
32 Resilient Rhody 2025 report, as published by the executive climate change coordinating council
33 (EC4), the Rhode Island department of environmental management , or any successor entity, and
34 any formal amendments or successor reports adopted by the state.

1 (6) "Ten-year implementation horizon" means the period of ten (10) years following voter
2 approval of this act, during which funded projects must be planned, designed, permitted, or
3 constructed in alignment with the resilience report's priority actions, timelines, and identified
4 implementation phases.

5 (c) Mandatory alignment with the resilience report.

6 All projects funded in whole or in part through the proceeds of the bonds authorized by
7 this act shall be:

8 (1) Directly related to high-risk areas or prioritized areas as defined in this section; and

9 (2) Consistent with and supportive of the resilience actions, priority solutions, hazard
10 mitigation objectives, or infrastructure protection strategies identified in the resilience report.

11 (d) Ten-(10) year priority requirement.

12 Bond proceeds shall be awarded to projects that are identified in the resilience report as
13 requiring action within the ten-(10) year implementation horizon, including projects categorized as
14 immediate, near-term, or medium-term priorities. Projects shall demonstrate that the funded
15 activities will result in measurable resilience benefits within the ten-(10) year implementation
16 horizon.

17 (e) Prohibition on non-priority spending.

18 No bond proceeds shall be obligated, expended, or awarded for any project that cannot
19 demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the administering agency, a direct and documented connection
20 to:

21 (1) A high-risk area or prioritized area; and

22 (2) A ten-(10) year priority action, resilience solution, or infrastructure need identified in
23 the resilience report.

24 (f) Required documentation for each project.

25 Each applicant seeking bond funding shall submit documentation including, at minimum:

26 (1) The location of the project and the specific high-risk or prioritized area served;

27 (2) Citation to the relevant section(s), map(s), or priority action(s) in the resilience report
28 demonstrating alignment;

29 (3) A description of the climate hazards being addressed;

30 (4) An estimate of the anticipated reduction in risk, damage, service disruption, or public
31 safety vulnerability; and

32 (5) A schedule demonstrating that the project will be initiated or completed within the ten-
33 (10) year implementation horizon.

34 (g) Public list of priority areas and eligible investments.

1 Within one hundred eighty (180) days of voter approval of this act, the administering
2 agency shall publish and maintain a publicly accessible list of:

- 3 (1) High-risk and prioritized areas eligible for investment under this act; and
- 4 (2) Project categories eligible for funding.

5 Such list shall be based on the resilience report and updated as the State publishes revised
6 risk mapping, hazard projections, or subsequent statewide resilience reports.

7 (h) Enforcement.

8 Any expenditure made in violation of this section shall be deemed an unauthorized
9 expenditure of bond proceeds and shall be subject to corrective action, including reallocation of
10 funds to eligible projects.

11 **SECTION 6. Allocation and administration.**

12 (a) The proceeds of the bonds authorized by this act shall be deposited in a special fund to
13 be known as the Blue Wave Bond Fund.

14 (b) The governor's office, in consultation with the Rhode Island infrastructure bank, the
15 department of environmental management, the coastal resources management council, the
16 department of transportation, the department of administration, and other relevant agencies, shall
17 establish a process to prioritize and approve eligible projects.

18 (c) In awarding funds, priority shall be given to projects that:

- 19 (1) Protect critical facilities and vulnerable populations;
- 20 (2) Reduce repetitive flood losses;
- 21 (3) Advance nature-based solutions where feasible;
- 22 (4) Improve statewide emergency response capacity;
- 23 (5) Leverage federal, municipal, and private matching funds;
- 24 (6) Support economic resilience of ports and working waterfronts;
- 25 (7) Provide measurable climate risk reduction benefits; and
- 26 (8) Create or sustain a trained workforce to implement resilience investments.

27 **SECTION 7. Allocation of bond proceeds - Funding schedule.**

28 (a) Allocation schedule.

29 Notwithstanding any other provision of law, proceeds of the bonds authorized by this act
30 shall be allocated for eligible project categories as follows:

- 31 (1) Coastal and Shoreline Protection. Thirty Million Dollars (\$30,000,000)
- 32 (2) Stormwater and Flood Mitigation Infrastructure. Twenty Million Dollars (\$20,000,000)
- 33 (3) Wastewater and Drinking Water System Resilience. Fifteen Million Dollars
- 34 (\$15,000,000)

1 (4) Transportation and Evacuation Route Resilience. Ten Million Dollars (\$10,000,000)

2 (5) Energy and Critical Infrastructure Hardening. Ten Million Dollars (\$10,000,000)

3 (6) Port, Harbor, and Working Waterfront Resilience. Ten Million Dollars (\$10,000,000)

4 (7) Public Facilities and Community Resilience Hubs. Three Million Dollars (\$3,000,000)

5 (8) Workforce Preparedness and Training. Two Million Dollars (\$2,000,000)

6 (b) Administrative cost limitation.

7 No more than two percent (2%) of the total bond proceeds may be used for administrative
8 purposes, including program management and grant administration.

9 (c) Flexibility provision.

10 The administering agency may transfer funds between categories listed in subsection (a)
11 by no more than ten percent (10%) of the total allocation for any category; provided that:

12 (1) Such transfer is justified by project readiness, cost escalation, or federal match
13 opportunities;

14 (2) The transfer remains consistent with section 5 of this act; and

15 (3) notice of such transfer is provided in writing to the speaker of the house, the president
16 of the senate, and the chairs of the house and senate finance committees no fewer than thirty (30)
17 days prior to obligation of the transferred funds.

18 (d) Minimum municipal grant set-aside.

19 Not less than twenty-five percent (25%) of the proceeds authorized under this act shall be
20 made available through competitive grants or direct awards to municipalities, regional entities, or
21 quasi-public agencies for eligible projects, provided such projects meet the requirements of section
22 5.

23 (e) Matching incentives.

24 The administering agency shall prioritize funding for projects that leverage federal funding,
25 private investment, or municipal matching funds, including FEMA hazard mitigation programs,
26 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers programs, and other federal infrastructure resilience grants.

27 **SECTION 8. Regional equity and distribution requirement.**

28 (a) Intent.

29 The general assembly finds that climate impacts threaten all regions of Rhode Island and
30 that equitable distribution of resilience investments is necessary to protect residents, economic
31 assets, and critical infrastructure statewide.

32 (b) Regional distribution.

33 In awarding funds, the administering agency shall ensure that investments are distributed
34 across coastal and inland regions of the state in a manner consistent with the high-risk and

1 prioritized areas identified in the resilience report.

2 (c) Minimum regional investment standard.

3 To ensure statewide benefit, the administering agency shall allocate not less than:

4 (1) Fifteen percent (15%) of total bond proceeds to projects located in or directly benefiting
5 Washington County,

6 (2) Fifteen percent (15%) of total bond proceeds to projects located in or directly benefiting
7 Kent County,

8 (3) Fifteen percent (15%) of total bond proceeds to projects located in or directly benefiting
9 Providence County, and

10 (4) Fifteen percent (15%) of total bond proceeds to projects located in or directly benefiting
11 Bristol and Newport Counties, including communities in the East Bay and Aquidneck Island.

12 (5) Fifteen percent (15%) of total bond proceeds to projects located in or directly benefiting
13 Blackstone Valley, including communities in the West Bay and Northern Rhode Island.

14 The remaining portion of bond proceeds may be allocated statewide to priority projects
15 meeting the requirements of section 5 of this act.

16 (d) Waiver authority.

17 The administering agency may waive the minimum regional investment standards in
18 subsection (c) of this section only upon written determination that:

19 (1) Insufficient eligible projects are ready for implementation in a region within the ten-
20 (10) year implementation horizon; or

21 (2) A statewide critical infrastructure project provides substantial benefits across multiple
22 regions.

23 Any waiver shall be reported in the annual report required under section 9 of this act and
24 shall include justification and alternative strategies to ensure equitable investment.

25 **SECTION 9. Accountability and reporting.**

26 (a) Within one hundred eighty (180) days of voter approval, the administering agency or
27 agencies shall publish a Blue Wave Bond Implementation Plan identifying:

28 (1) A preliminary list of projects to be funded;

29 (2) Estimated costs and timelines;

30 (3) Geographic distribution of investments;

31 (4) Anticipated resilience outcomes and performance measures; and

32 (5) Workforce preparedness investments and expected workforce outcomes.

33 (b) An annual report shall be submitted to the governor and the general assembly and
34 posted publicly, describing:

- 1 (1) Funds obligated and expended;
- 2 (2) Status of funded projects;
- 3 (3) Workforce training outcomes and participation metrics;
- 4 (4) Resilience performance measures achieved; and
- 5 (5) Progress toward protecting high-risk and prioritized areas under the resilience report.

6 **SECTION 10. Proposition to be submitted to the people.**

7 At the general election to be held on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November 2026,
8 there shall be submitted to the people of the State of Rhode Island, for their approval or rejection,
9 the following proposition:

10 The question submitted shall be substantially in the following form:

11 **BALLOT QUESTION.**

12 Shall the State of Rhode Island issue general obligation bonds in an amount not to exceed
13 one hundred million dollars (\$100,000,000) for the Blue Wave Bond for Coastal Preparedness to
14 fund coastal protection, stormwater and flood mitigation, wastewater and drinking water resilience,
15 transportation and evacuation route upgrades, energy and critical infrastructure hardening, port and
16 working waterfront resilience, resilience hubs, and workforce preparedness and training programs,
17 with investments limited to high-risk and prioritized areas identified in the state's resilience report
18 for implementation within the next ten (10) years?

19 YES

20 NO

21 **SECTION 11. EFFECTIVE DATE.** Sections 1, 2, 10, and 11 of this act shall take effect
22 upon passage. The remaining sections of this act shall take effect when and if the state board of
23 elections shall certify to the secretary of state that a majority of the qualified electors voting on the
24 proposition contained in section 10 hereof have indicated their approval of the project thereunder.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO THE BLUE WAVE BOND FOR COASTAL PREPAREDNESS -- 2026 BOND
REFERENDUM

1 This act would be a proposed bond measure that would authorize the State of Rhode Island
2 to issue up to one hundred million dollars (\$100,000,000) in general obligation bonds, subject to
3 voter approval, to fund coastal preparedness and resilience projects. Funds would be used for
4 shoreline protection, flood mitigation, stormwater and wastewater upgrades, protection of critical
5 facilities, port and working waterfront resilience, and workforce preparedness and training
6 programs to support resilience-related jobs and infrastructure investments. Bond proceeds may only
7 be used for projects in high-risk and prioritized areas identified in the state’s resilience report for
8 implementation within the next ten (10) years.

9 Sections 1, 2, 10, and 11 of this act would take effect upon passage. The remaining sections
10 of this act would take effect when and if the state board of elections shall certify to the secretary of
11 state that a majority of the qualified electors voting on the proposition contained in section 10 of
12 this act hereof have indicated their approval of the project thereunder.

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