

2026 -- H 7726 SUBSTITUTE A

LC004762/SUB A

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

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

Introduced By: Representatives Boylan, Potter, DeSimone, Handy, Caldwell, Carson, Cortvriend, McGaw, Speakman, and Voas

Date Introduced: February 12, 2026

Referred To: House Corporations

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 of twenty-five kilowatts (25 kW) AC capacity or less;

4 or

5 (ii) A solar energy system of twenty-five kilowatts (25 kW) AC capacity or less installed  
6 on a property that is served by a residential electric meter, or that otherwise qualifies for expedited  
7 or simplified interconnection review by the electric distribution company, regardless of the  
8 ownership or use of the property.

9 (4) "Energy storage system" means any technology capable of converting electrical energy  
10 to some form of stored energy for reconversion to electrical energy at a later time.

11 **39-36-3. Statewide smart solar permitting platform.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1           **39-36-4. Municipal participation and equivalency.**

2           (a) Not later than eighteen (18) months after the effective date of this chapter, every  
3 municipality shall allow applications for residential solar energy systems or other eligible small-  
4 scale solar energy systems to be submitted and permits issued instantly through:

5           (1) The statewide smart solar permitting platform; or

6           (2) An alternative automated solar permitting platform that is substantially equivalent to,  
7 or better than, the statewide platform.

8           (b) An alternative automated platform shall be deemed substantially equivalent only if it:

9           (1) Performs automated code compliance checks;

10           (2) Issues permits and permit revisions instantly without follow-up manual plan review for  
11 code-compliant applications; and

12           (3) Does not require the submission of documentation beyond what is required by the  
13 statewide smart solar permitting platform.

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

17           **39-36-5. Limitation on manual plan review.**

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

22           **39-36-6. Engineering documentation thresholds.**

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

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

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

34           **39-36-7. Electronic submissions and form requirements.**

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

4 (b) A permit application submitted through such a platform shall not be denied, delayed,  
5 or deemed incomplete solely due to a failure to comply with a requirement relating to the physical  
6 form, format, size, or method of submission of documents.

7 **39-36-8. Centralized repository of municipal solar ordinances.**

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

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

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

15 **39-36-9. Remote preliminary inspections.**

16 (a)(1) By January 1, 2028, a city or town shall offer homeowners the option of requesting  
17 remote preliminary inspections, with the inspection conducted off site, for preliminary or “rough”  
18 inspections that may be required as part of the process for inspecting photovoltaic and energy  
19 storage systems in one and two (2) family dwelling units.

20 (2) Remote preliminary inspections shall be conducted primarily through the submission  
21 of recorded photographs and videos demonstrating compliance with a city or town’s applicable  
22 code requirements.

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

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

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

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

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

1 and/or contractors who have been found to willfully misrepresent the work.

2 (3) If a remote preliminary inspection conducted pursuant to § 39-36-9 for a solar  
3 installation fails, a building inspector may, at their discretion, conduct additional preliminary  
4 inspections regarding that building permit remotely or in person.

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

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

9 **39-36-10. Final inspections.**

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

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

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

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

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

26 (c) Upon mutual agreement between the municipal or local permitting authority and the  
27 installer, inspections are allowed without the presence of the installer.

28 **39-36-11. Reports to office of energy resources.**

29 (a) By July 1, 2028, and annually thereafter, jurisdictions shall provide a report to the office  
30 of energy resources that confirms that they have implemented a remote preliminary inspection  
31 program in compliance with this chapter, and reports the number of inspections for different types  
32 of permits that are done remotely and in person, and the failure rates of each inspection. The office  
33 of energy resources shall develop standards for the reports, and shall post the reports to its internet  
34 website.

1           **(b) By January 1, 2028, and annually thereafter, for jurisdictions that have implemented**  
2 **equivalent automated permitting platforms in lieu of using the state’s permitting platform,**  
3 **jurisdictions shall provide a report to the office of energy resources that confirms its compliance**  
4 **with this chapter, and reports the number of permits issued and the failure rates of permit**  
5 **applications. The office of energy resources shall develop standards for the reports, and shall post**  
6 **the reports to its website.**

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

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

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF  
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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 preliminary inspections as a valid practice for typical rooftop residential  
5 installations in an effort to reduce administrative costs for Rhode Island's municipalities,  
6 businesses, and consumers.

7           This act would take effect upon passage.

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