



September 2, 2025

The Honorable Senator Becca Rausch, Chair
Joint Committee on Environment & Natural Resources
State House, Room 215
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Representative Christine Barber, Chair
Joint Committee on Environment & Natural Resources
State House, Room 167
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Testimony in support of H.971 / S.558, An Act establishing a pilot program for nature-based solutions to climate change

Dear Chair Rausch, Chair Barber, and members of the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources,

Our organizations appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony in support of two identical bills, [H.971](#) and [S.558](#), *An Act establishing a pilot program for nature-based solutions to climate change*. Last session, these bills were engrossed by both the House and Senate.

The climate crisis has brought more frequent and intense storms and sea level rise to Massachusetts' coastal communities. Each new flood event highlights the need to implement coastal protections. Cities and towns throughout Massachusetts have a choice: defend their shoreline with traditional infrastructure potentially walling off communities from their waterfronts - or implement nature-based and hybrid solutions where feasible. Nature-based solutions are designed to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural and modified ecosystems to address climate change impacts, providing benefits for people and the environment. These approaches may include living shorelines, living seawalls, offshore reefs and other innovations that mimic natural systems and help communities adapt to climate change while providing ecological, social, and economic benefits while maintaining and improving public access.

The challenges posed by the existing, outmoded regulatory framework make it difficult to test and demonstrate the range of benefits and establish official best practices for implementation of nature-based projects. The current permitting structure for a wide range of environmental protection programs is decades old and not designed to allow many available nature-based approaches to occur along our coast, especially seaward of mean high water.

To address these challenges, our organizations support passage of H.971 and S.558. This legislation would facilitate the advancement of research and demonstration projects and advance our knowledge and understanding of nature-based approaches in a real-world setting. Passage of this legislation will allow researchers, scientists, academics, regulators, municipalities, and a host of other stakeholders to help identify new ways to improve coastal resilience to climate impacts.

Specifically, these bills direct the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs to create a pilot program to develop performance standards and define specific categories of projects to further the use of nature-based solutions. The bills require improved interagency coordination, efficiency in the permitting process, and annual reports to the legislature assessing project effectiveness and recommending regulatory adjustments. The legislation contains a five-year sunset clause, allowing project proponents to evaluate the impacts and effectiveness of the program and projects. Rather than serving as a directive, it gives state agencies the ability to respond to the climate crisis with both flexibility and urgency. A key component of these research projects will be extensive physical monitoring requirements that will allow adaptive management interventions needed to avoid environmental impacts. An important goal is for agencies to permit nature-based projects to occur seaward of mean high water particularly along urban waterfronts. While these bills would not exempt projects from regulatory review or oversight by agencies, they would enable similar permitting flexibility already allowed for projects to maintain and improve existing roadways, landfill closures, and construction and maintenance of electrical generation facilities.

Last session, these bills were reported favorably by the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources and both Ways and Means committees, before being engrossed by both the House and Senate. We urge the committee to act expeditiously to help us prepare for intensifying and more frequent storms, flooding and sea level rise by providing a favorable report to both H.971 and S.558.

Please note, we also support the statutory and regulatory reforms proposed in the Mass Ready Act that will enable nature-based solutions projects to be implemented through general permits; and we hope for “nature-based research and demonstration projects” to be explicitly included in the legislation so such projects can also be eligible for expedited and efficient permitting.

The time is now to allow nature-based research and demonstration pilot projects to be implemented in Massachusetts. Passage of this legislation will create a critical tool for state agencies, municipalities, nonprofits, property owners, and key partners across the

Commonwealth to prepare waterfront communities for these challenges and build a more resilient coast.

If you have questions, please contact Linda Orel at lore1@bostonharbornow.org or 617-360-1857.

Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

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