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April 3, 2025

Honorable Maura Healey
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Environmental Bond Bill

Dear Governor Healey:

In collaboration with the Massachusetts Community Tree Coalition, the municipalities listed below urge you to include in the Environmental Bond Bill to be filed this Spring \$100 million over five years for An Act Establishing the Municipal Reforestation Program (S.553/H.1013). This is a rare opportunity to create a funding mechanism for municipalities across the Commonwealth to plant and care for trees in neighborhoods experiencing extreme heat due to a lack of canopy cover. This funding will help municipalities realize their urban forest plans and address their climate vulnerability assessments.

The residents in the municipalities we represent need your support to ensure our environmental and economic health and well-being. As you have said, “[A]ddressing the climate crisis requires a comprehensive, coordinated approach across all of state government.” The bill sets up funding for municipal programs that are fully aligned with the “whole of government approach” advanced in the 2023 *Recommendations of the Climate Chief*. The Municipal Reforestation Program integrates state government goals with municipal goals in urban forestry. Importantly, the program supports community collaboration, education and workforce training pathways, greater social cohesion, broader civic engagement, improved mental health, and more robust local economic development.

As municipalities, especially those with lower tree canopy cover, we face significant barriers to meeting our planting targets and improving the lives of our most vulnerable residents. The urban forest crisis cannot be addressed by municipal budgets alone, nor by a piecemeal approach of those municipalities that have the tax base to support the procurement and planting programs required. Including funding in the Environmental Bond Bill provides both the equity and the coordination needed to improve lives and increase livelihoods across the Commonwealth.

Purpose of Municipal Reforestation Program

This program builds on the successes of the Greening the Gateway Cities and the Cooling Corridors programs and augments the benefits they provide. The bill sets up a structure to

provide funding and technical assistance for municipalities to create a robust urban tree canopy cover, focusing on neighborhoods with few trees. Planting urban trees would improve public health, combat climate change, promote environmental justice, and enhance biodiversity—all high-level initiatives outlined in the *2023 Climate Recommendations*.

Climate Adaptation

Increasing the urban tree canopy mitigates the adverse impacts of climate change. Urban trees help achieve the goals of ResilientMass by absorbing carbon, providing shade to lower ambient temperature, mitigating stormwater damage, reducing air pollution, and providing habitat for pollinators and birds. A more robust tree canopy is deeply intertwined with increasing energy efficiency in urban areas, reducing the use of cooling and heating systems, lowering overall energy consumption, and helping the Commonwealth achieve its 2050 Net Zero mandate.

Environmental Justice Impact

The bill redresses environmental justice conditions often prevalent in low-income neighborhoods by prioritizing planting trees in neighborhoods with (i) a low tree canopy (less than 20%), (ii) heat islands during extreme hot weather, and (iii) high levels of air pollution that result in negative health impacts. The funding in this bill will add to the success of the Office of Environmental Justice and Equity.

Physical and Mental Health

Increasing green space and tree coverage is a public health intervention for both physical and mental health outcomes. Heat is now the leading cause of climate change-related mortality. In heat islands, tree shade reduces temperature by 10-20°F, reducing heat-related illness and death. Trees also reduce air pollutants by up to 25%, lowering the incidence of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. Increased access to greenspace is associated with reduced levels of anxiety and depression in children and youth. Overall, for every \$1 invested in tree coverage, approximately \$2.25 is saved in healthcare-related costs.

Workforce Training and Economic Development

The bill recognizes the need for an expanded workforce to source, plant, and maintain municipal trees. Municipal urban forestry plans across the Commonwealth call for thousands of trees to be planted each year for at least the next 50 years - a level that will be difficult to meet with the capacity of the Commonwealth's existing arboricultural industry. Currently, many municipalities must source their trees from places like New York. We will need sustainable capital investment programs to build a new tree pipeline and take advantage of the skills, knowledge, and workforce already in the state.

The bill also sets aside funding to train young adults from underserved communities and provides a career path in urban arboriculture. These state-wide reforestation efforts provide a

pipeline for graduates of the Commonwealth's higher education programs. Finally, this work helps realize the goals of the proposed Climate Service Corps, economic development goals outlined in the *Recommendations* report, and municipal planning documents. The bill complements the work of the Mass Clean Energy Center green jobs programs and offers opportunities for quasi-agencies like MassDevelopment to create capital seed funding for new nurseries in rural parts of the state.

Enhancing Biodiversity

The bill helps address the critical loss of biodiversity by prioritizing the use of native trees, which are essential to reversing the rapid decline in insects, birds, and other species in the Commonwealth.

The Environmental Bond Bill will address numerous environmental priorities. Investing in urban reforestation is a wise and impactful decision that will yield significant long-term benefits for our communities and the environment and will make a positive impact on the health and economic well-being of the Commonwealth for decades to come.

Sincerely,

Katjana Ballantyne, Mayor, City of Somerville
Brian Swett, Chief Climate Officer, City of Boston
Breanna Lungo-Koehn, Mayor, City of Medford
Fidel Maltez, City Manager, City of Chelsea
Yi-An Huang, City Manager, City of Cambridge
Sam Squailia, Mayor, City of Fitchburg
Carlo DeMaria, Mayor, City of Everett
Katy Rogers, City Council At Large, City of Everett
Khrystian King, Vice Chair and City Councilor At-Large, City of Worcester
Paul E. Cohen, Town Manager, Town of Chelmsford
Cathleen DeSimone, Mayor, City of Attleboro
Tom Derderian, Tree Warden, City of Winthrop
Kyle Grendell, Tree Warden, Town Of Westborough
Susan Dougherty, Chair, Selectboard, Town of Petersham
James R. Feeney, Town Manager, Town of Arlington
Brandon Schmitt, Natural Resources Commission Director, Town Of Wellesley
James Sacco, Tree Warden, Town of Sandwich
Erin Anhalt, Chief of Staff, City of Greenfield

And the Massachusetts Community Tree Coalition (masscommunitytrees.org)

Municipalities signing on after April 3rd, 2025

Paul Bockelman, Town Manager, Town of Amherst