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To: House Finance Committee, RI General Assembly

Re: H7225 Article 3 Section 17- testimony in opposition to rental registry delay and reduction in scope/transparency

Date: 2/29/24

Dear Chairman Abney, members of the committee.

Thank you for hearing our testimony. My name is DeeAnn Guo, and I am a community organizer with the Childhood Lead Action Project, a nonprofit organization founded in 1992 dedicated to the elimination of childhood lead poisoning in Rhode Island through parent support, education, and advocacy. We work to organize families affected by lead poisoning and their supporters throughout the state.

We support funding for the rental registry but oppose the changes to the rental registry as proposed in this budget.

The rental registry just passed in the last session, and there was broad support for it. It would increase transparency between landlords and tenants and facilitate compliance with existing lead laws.

The proposal in the budget would reduce the scope of the registry and require only landlords with pre-1978 homes to register. This is a significant departure from the General Assembly's intent to create a comprehensive database of rental properties in RI. Requiring all landlords to register is necessary for transparency and so that officials can communicate with landlords about a variety of issues. These include health and safety requirements, landlord-tenant law, and opportunities for technical or financial assistance related to managing a rental property. And even from a limited lead poisoning prevention standpoint, although lead paint was banned in 1978, the state needs to be able to communicate effectively with owners of post-1978 properties. For example, the additional legislation passed by the General Assembly last year created a mandatory 10-day period to give people the option of getting a lead inspection during the sale of homes built before 2011. This is because there is the possibility of lead in pipes or water fixtures and is one example of how a pre-1978 registry would fall short of even being a lead registry.

Additionally, post-1978 landlords are exempt from having a lead certificate, so they only have to register information like a working email address, phone number, and address. Retaining the scope of the original registry should not increase the budget dramatically at all.

Pushing back the timeline of the registry so that it is set up one year later is also disappointing to see. We've seen comments from a small handful of landlords that this might be helpful to allow for time to obtain lead certificates, but the Lead Hazard Mitigation Act has been in effect for close to two decades, and it applies to most landlords. The registry is not creating the requirement to get and maintain a lead certificate, it is a tool to help enforce an existing one.

This also proposes that only the noncompliant landlords will be published publicly. Once again, obscuring information contradicts a primary goal of the registry, which is transparency. This change in the public database means that tenants or prospective tenants who may be looking for information about their home can only find landlords that are missing a lead certificate on the list. However, any properties that the Health Department hasn't identified as a rental and that have not already registered will be missing from that list. Compliant and noncompliant landlords will be mixed up in a list that is not accessible to the public. It is confusing and unhelpful.

A good law was passed last year, one that will ultimately protect children from lead poisoning. These proposed changes are second guessing the general assembly and would leave families without adequate help for yet another year.

Sincerely,
DeeAnn Guo
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