



February 29th, 2024

The Honorable Representative Marvin Abney
Chair of the House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Opposition to H7225, Article 3, Section 17

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Committee on Finance,

Reclaim Rhode Island opposes Article 3, Section 17, in bill H7225, which would make harmful changes to the rental registry passed by the legislature in 2023. We believe this section should be removed from the budget, and that the legislation as passed in 2023 should be allowed to come into effect, with the rental registry fully funded to function as expected.

Reclaim RI is a leading tenant rights organization in Rhode Island, and we typically organize tenants living in homes that do not meet our state's basic health and safety standards. The rental registry was a huge victory for these tenants, as it would shine a light on their properties and the glaring code violations within. We have met many tenants whose children were lead poisoned, and had almost no options for recourse or remediation of their homes. We have worked with tenants whose children are lead poisoned, and they get evicted while they're figuring out how to handle this new diagnosis. Landlords should not be allowed to evict when they haven't met basic safety standards and are in compliance on file with the registry. These tenants need a rental registry so their living conditions are on the radar of the Department Of Health, with the ultimate goal of making all housing safe to inhabit.

The proposed changes in the budget would limit the registry to only pre-1978 rental units, prevent the disclosure of landlord contact information to tenants, and shift the start date of the registry to September 1st, 2025. These changes only serve to benefit bad-actor landlords, and will only result in more children being lead poisoned.

The rental registry must include all rental units, not just pre-1978 units - this is a small ask of landlords, and similar to other types of business registration that other industries in Rhode Island must comply with.

It is crucial that the registry be publicly accessible, and contain contact information for landlords and property managers. Many other code violations in rental units, not just lead issues, are unresolved because the tenant cannot get in touch with the landlord. We have also seen instances where municipal housing courts can't find landlords! This is a basic public safety issue and will help tenants and the courts know who to contact when there are code violations.

Finally, the rental registry must not be delayed any further - a recent article by Nina Sparling on The Public's Radio website stated that over 500 children a year are lead poisoned. This is unacceptable, and it's time for landlords to prove they are in compliance with state law by registering their properties with the state, and ensuring their lead certificates are up to date.

Sincerely,

Reclaim RI