tenant network ri

Sitting Members of the RI House Finance Committee,
% Hon. Marvin Abney, State Representative District 73 - Chair

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To Whom It May Concern:

Tenant Network of RI is a group of tenants, renters, unhoused neighbors and their supporters fighting for tenants' rights and providing mutual aid to residents across Rhode Island. This group began meeting regularly in March, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has since grown to include around 150 members, many affinity organizations, and a support network of hundreds of concerned Rhode Islanders. Our work continues to be vital as the pandemic evolves and the most vulnerable continue to be exploited in the name of profits and commerce.

The Governor declared a pandemic public health emergency in March, 2020. The federal government declared a public health emergency at the same time, and the President empowered the CDC to impose an eviction moratorium for cases involving non-payment of rent in August, 2020. This moratorium was removed by the Supreme Court in September, 2021.

It is now late October, 2021. Cases of COVID-19 in Rhode Island continue to plague our communities, most notably children and the unvaccinated. Eviction cases are proceeding in our District Court at a rate of more than 50 families every week. Many cases are for termination of monthly tenancy and often result in default judgments as tenants don't bother showing up to court–these residents end up on the street, as shelters are full. There is no place for them to go.

In the last month alone, members of Providence City Council bulldozed two unhoused encampments. These human beings and hundreds of others every night have nowhere to go. Almost all of them are on housing waiting lists. We are one week away from November, 2021.

If we don't spend the portion of the billion ARPA dollars on COVID response and relief *now*, then when?

We whole-heartedly support this request from the Governor's administration and, if anything, believe the amount is not high enough to shelter everyone in our state immediately and provide long term, safe, stable housing in the medium term. It misses key provisions for staffing outreach agencies, placing formerly incarcerated people, and other details for which we look to the House to crystallize and advocate.

Sincerely,

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