



**RHODE ISLAND COALITION
OF HOUSING PROVIDERS**

www.ricohp.org

March 25, 2024

To Honorable Representative Robert E. Craven, Sr.
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903
VIA Email: HouseJudiciary@rilegislature.gov

RE: Letter in OPPOSITION to House Bill No. 7305

Dear Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Rhode Island Coalition of Housing Providers ("the coalition") in strong opposition to House Bill 7305. The coalition represents a diverse group of housing providers throughout the State of Rhode Island all striving to provide safe and quality housing to those Rhode Islanders that need it and believes the passing of this bill will hurt landlords and tenants alike. While we understand the importance of ensuring fair and equitable access to housing for all individuals, we have significant concerns about the potential implications and unintended consequences of this legislation.

Expanding the protections for "assistance animals" in rental properties to being akin to professionally trained service animals without appropriate safeguards could lead to abuse and exploitation of the system, undermining the rights of landlords and potentially compromising the well-being and safety of other tenants. While we fully support the rights of individuals with disabilities to have assistance animals as reasonable accommodations under the Fair Housing Act, it is essential to maintain integrity in the accommodation process and prevent fraudulent claims that may erode trust and credibility within the housing community. By legislating that an untrained "assistance animal" requires the same protection as a professionally trained "service animal" without any safeguards may have a negative impact on those who need those accommodations the most.

Furthermore, by adding "housing status" as a protected class for discrimination purposes may inadvertently create undue burdens and legal liabilities for landlords, property managers, and housing providers. While discrimination based on housing status is a legitimate concern, the proposed legislation risks conflating socioeconomic status with other protected classes, such as race, gender, disability, or religion, thereby diluting the effectiveness of existing anti-discrimination laws and undermining efforts to combat systemic discrimination and promote equality.

Moreover, there are significant unintended consequences to adding “housing status” as a protected class. Importantly, if passed the law would create a situation where a landlord could **not** inquire about a prospective applicant’s prior *rental history*, inquire as to their *current address*, and even confirm the applicant is who they say they are because doing so will require an address which may be protected under this law. Stopping a landlord from conducting regular due diligence on any applicant is a cause for serious concern and may create unsafe situations for other residents that reside at the very same property.

Moreover, restricting a landlords screening ability, may ultimately lead to a breakdown in trust between landlords and tenants, as landlords would be unable to adequately assess the suitability of applicants for their properties. Moreover, existing tenants may lose faith in the landlord and in the property in which they reside. This could result in rule and law-abiding tenants to leave properties that would otherwise be good fits for housing them. While addressing discrimination is vital, it's essential to balance these concerns with the need for landlords to maintain the integrity and security of their rental properties.

Instead of pursuing blanket policies that may have unintended consequences and exacerbate existing challenges within the housing market, we urge you to consider alternative approaches that balance the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords while addressing legitimate concerns related to discrimination and housing access. Strengthening education and outreach efforts, providing resources and support services for tenants and landlords, and fostering constructive dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders are essential steps toward achieving fair and equitable housing outcomes for all individuals.

We respectfully urge you to reconsider the proposed bill and explore alternative strategies that promote housing accessibility, protect property rights, and combat discrimination in a manner that is fair, transparent, and effective. Let us work together to develop pragmatic solutions that address the diverse needs and challenges of our communities while upholding the principles of fairness, equity, and justice.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important legislation.

RI Coalition of Housing Providers