



May 20, 2024

Representative Robert E. Craven, Chair
House Judiciary Committee

RE: Testimony in Support of H 7959, An Act Relating to Property – Residential Landlord and Tenant Act

United Way of Rhode Island (UWRI) is writing to express its support for House Bill 7959. This crucial piece of legislation aligns with our dedication to secure safe and affordable housing for all Rhode Islanders. UWRI's 211 social service referral network receives more requests for housing support than any other area. Rhode Island must change the housing market by empowering tenants directly. United Way of Rhode Island urges the House Committee on Judiciary to address housing by protecting populations most at risk of homelessness, namely immigrants to the United States.

Without legal protection against housing discrimination, households are vulnerable to unscrupulous landlords operating residential units without formal lease agreements. This off-the-books situation is dangerous, because there's no recourse for tenants for poor conditions, exploitive fees, or abusive landlord behavior. H7959 would go a long way to protecting this priority population from exploitation

Residential landlord and tenant policy is not hypothetical, abstract law- these are rules that affect who can find a home in Rhode Island. United Way of Rhode Island is committed to securing safe and affordable housing for everyone who makes Rhode Island their home. We believe in targeting the root causes of inequality to lift communities out of poverty, and we know housing is the first step in moving individuals and families from crisis to stability. Please consider United Way of Rhode Island's full support of House Bill 7959 in your deliberation.

Very best,
Peggy Desjarlais
Program Officer, Housing and Economic Development Policy

