

Testimony in Support of HB-5916 & HB-5503 – Tenant Protections

House Committee on Judiciary

March 18, 2025

Megan Gilbert, Master of Social Work Intern, Economic Progress Institute

The Economic Progress Institute strongly supports Rep. Stewart's H5916 and Rep. Cruz's H5503, which aim to increase protections for renters in Rhode Island and help prevent the devastating consequences of eviction.

Rep. Stewart's H5916 increases the eviction notice period for month-to-month tenants from 30 to 60 days and extends it up to 120 days for elderly renters. **Rep. Cruz's H5503** expands the definitions of key factors in the Just Cause Eviction legislation, further identifying and protecting vulnerable populations.

All Rhode Islanders deserve affordable, safe housing. When facing financial, medical, or other challenges, finding a new home can add significant challenges and evictions can cause devastating consequences. As a social case worker for over 20 years, I have seen low-income individuals and families with children, disabled, or elderly adults struggle when a major life crisis occurs, such as the loss of a financially contributing member or a sudden medical crisis. This increases caregiver stress and financial obligations, making it harder to find a new place to live.

Low-income, elderly, and disabled tenants, as well as families with children, need adequate time to find housing near essential resources like schools, bus lines, jobs, and medical providers. Providing renters with more time increases the likelihood they can secure suitable housing, thereby reducing the risk of homelessness. Additionally, expanding tenant rights positively impacts the broader community by promoting stable housing, which leads to improved public health, better educational outcomes for children, and reduced strain on social services.

Tenant protections are also important, because, currently, far too many Rhode Islanders are struggling to meet their basic needs without assistance. According to Eviction Lab, Black and Latino renters in Rhode Island face significantly higher eviction rates compared to their White counterparts. Specifically, Black renters are nearly twice as likely to be evicted as White renters, and Latino renters also face disproportionately high eviction rates (Eviction Lab, 2025).

Since March 2020, Rhode Island has experienced over 16,000 eviction filings, exacerbating the state's homelessness crisis (Uprise RI, 2023). The lifting of the COVID-19 eviction moratorium led to a significant spike in eviction filings, with more than one-third of households being cost-burdened and over 20% of renters paying more than 50% of their income on housing (WPRI, 2025). This has resulted in a 105% increase in the number of chronically homeless and unsheltered individuals in RI (WPRI, 2025). Additionally, in 2023 Providence experienced the highest average rent increase in the country. Renters are struggling.

Representative Stewart's H5916 and Representative Cruz's H5503 would help protect Rhode Islanders from the devastating consequences of eviction. The Economic Progress Institute strongly urges the passage of both of these bills.

References:

Economic Progress Institute. (2024). *Rhode Island Standard of Need*. Retrieved from [Economic Progress Institute](http://www.economicprogressri.org).

Eviction Lab. (2025). Eviction Tracking System. Retrieved from <https://evictionlab.org/eviction-tracking/>

Uprise RI. (2023). *Rhode Island's Eviction Crisis: Alarming Increase in Filings and Homelessness*. Retrieved from [Uprise RI](http://upriseri.org).

WPRI. (2025). *RI lawmakers seek solutions to growing homelessness crisis*. Retrieved from [WPRI](http://wpriradio.com).