

18 March 2025

To the Honorable Members of the Rhode Island House Committee on Judiciary,

My name is David Jesse Mathis, and I am on the Advocacy Team of Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere. As an advocate for the unhoused community, I write to you **in strong support of bill H5503**. This bill prohibits arbitrary eviction and prevents displacement, discrimination, and retaliation.

As the housing crisis worsens in Rhode Island, tenants need to feel secure in their living situation now more than ever. Four percent of RI renter households had evictions filed last year, and another four percent were threatened with eviction. Out of all evictions that occurred, 80 percent of evictions were for non-payment, and 20 percent were for other reasons. At the same time, homelessness increased 35 percent last year, and unsheltered homelessness saw a five times increase over the past five years.

There is no denying that these two issues are interconnected. As more tenants are being forced out of their homes, more and more people are ending up in our overflowing shelters or are left to sleep on the streets. The statistics above are not just numbers. They are people being forced from their homes, and entire communities being ripped apart. As arbitrary evictions continue, landlords can also use “no-fault” evictions as a cover to replace tenants who advocate for liveable conditions and attempt to organize with one another.

In states such as California and Oregon, similar provisions to this proposed bill have been shown to decrease evictions, eviction filings, and rent spikes. As H5503 would increase the amount of tenants staying in their communities, people in Rhode Island would be able to build stronger connections with their neighbors. This bill would create more whole and supportive communities, as people would not have to fear for their or their neighbors’ arbitrary eviction. It would additionally help make Rhode Island a more affordable place to live, with fewer spikes in rent and less tenant vulnerability.

I call on the Rhode Island House Committee on Judiciary to stand with renters and support this bill, a step in the right direction towards an equitable housing market in Rhode Island.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

David Jesse Mathis and the Advocacy Team of Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere