

Dear Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Erica Sahin, and I am writing on behalf of the Vital Documents Gathering (VDG) team of Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere (HOPE) in **strong support of bill H5503, the Residential Landlord and Tenant Act**, which prohibits unjust evictions without cause.

The Vital Documents Gathering team runs a volunteer weekly clinic at Mathewson Church where we assist folks in getting disability bus passes, birth certificates, state IDs, and other necessary paperwork for obtaining jobs and housing. We frequently face requests to help someone navigate the convoluted and inefficient process of making it through the waitlists for shelter beds or subsidized housing. These waitlists take YEARS to get off of, and something as small as missing a phone call can place someone back at the end of the line.

Additionally, many of the people we see are missing the documents required to get on the list in the first place. Birth certificates are required for new IDs; proofs of low income and disability are needed for bus passes and also rely on identification. With no issues, each new document can still take weeks to *months* to come through. These setbacks compound stress and instability and only further delay the opportunity of getting off the street and into stable housing and work. None of these problems are the fault of unhoused people trying to improve their lives, just as no-cause evictions are not the fault of the tenant.

The easiest way to help someone out of homelessness is to prevent them from being pushed out of housing in the first place. Rhode Island does not have the infrastructure and support for the 600+ people currently living outside, and with rising costs of rent, this number will only grow. H5503 institutes just cause eviction protections to stop landlords from forcing tenants out without reason. This bill will protect tenants from discrimination and allow residents to advocate for safe living conditions without fear of retaliation. To fairly limit the number of evictions by non-payment, this bill also caps the rising costs of rents at 4% or equivalent to tax increases. This bill is essential to slowing the rise of the number of people outside and making space for this legislature's other work on housing and homelessness to have a significant impact and not simply be a bandaid to this crisis.

The housing system already relies on volunteers and case workers who are overwhelmed and cannot help everyone. I urge you to pass H5503 to protect tenants and the housing they rely on. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Erica Sahin

Vital Documents Gather Team

Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere