

Testimony in Support of H 5503
House Judiciary Committee
Submitted by Samuel Cramer
March 18, 2025

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

The Rhode Island Center for Justice submits this written testimony in support of passage of H 5503. The Center for Justice practices landlord tenant law and is one of two organizations in the state that represents tenants in substantial numbers. Each year we represent over 1,000 Rhode Islanders in court proceedings and advise thousands more about their rights under state and federal law. Through this work, we have become intimately familiar with the struggles faced by Rhode Islanders as they navigate a difficult housing market.

Rhode Island's current Landlord-Tenant Act allows tenant evictions without a clear reason. While eviction for non-payment of rent and eviction for lease violations are covered under existing statutes, the absence of a unified framework for termination of tenancies not related to non-payment or lease violations can lead to confusion and litigation. For tenants, this uncertainty can mean sudden and unjust displacement, especially for vulnerable groups like low-income households, seniors, and people with disabilities. The absence of clear, codified eviction standards in this category of eviction leaves tenants at risk of arbitrary eviction, making housing stability unpredictable and worsening the already challenging rental market for those most in need of protection.

A for-cause eviction standard in termination of tenancy matters also offers much-needed clarity for landlords by establishing clear, objective grounds for removing tenants, significantly reducing the risk of drawn-out legal disputes. Transparent guidelines, such as personal use of the property, including family move-ins, enable landlords to manage their properties with consistency and confidence. This approach not only safeguards property rights but also helps avoid legal ambiguity, fostering a more predictable and stable rental market.

For tenants, a for-cause eviction standard provides essential protection by ensuring that evictions are based on legitimate, codified reasons, preventing unjust or arbitrary displacement and preventing terminations that may be a pretext masking discrimination or other impermissible bases. This is especially important for vulnerable groups who are most at risk of housing instability. By clearly defining the grounds for eviction, tenants gain a better understanding of their responsibilities, promoting accountability. The reform creates a fair, transparent process,

allowing tenants to maintain stable housing while adhering to their obligations, and making the rental market more equitable for all parties.

We encourage this committee to recommend passage of this important protection. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Samuel Cramer, Esq.
1 Empire Street Suite 410
Providence, RI 02903
401-491-1101 (office)
401-216-7298 (cell)
scramer@centerforjustice.org