

RHODE ISLAND COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

180 WESTMINSTER STREET

PROVIDENCE, RI 02903

TESTIMONY

BILL NO.: 2025 H 5674
BILL TITLE: Act Relating to Property – Residential Landlord and Tenant Act
PRIMARY SPONSOR: Representative Giraldo

BILL NO.: 2025 H 5675
BILL TITLE: Act Relating to Property – Residential Landlord and Tenant Act
PRIMARY SPONSOR: Representative Perez

The Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights (“Commission”) supports these bills.

The Commission is the state’s primary antidiscrimination law enforcement agency charged with investigating allegations of discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, credit and delivery of services. Among the allegations investigated by the Commission are those of race, color and ancestral origin discrimination in housing. These bills would prevent landlords and their agents from asking questions about the immigration or citizenship status of tenants or prospective tenants and prohibit municipalities and housing authorities from compelling landlords or their agents to ask such questions. **The Commission believes that passage of these bills would foster fair housing.**

Anecdotal evidence available to the Commission suggests that, in requesting information about immigration or citizenship status, some landlords target ethnic minorities, people with accents or people who, in the landlords' estimation, appear to be foreign-born. The impact upon certain racial/ethnic minorities, regardless of their immigration or citizenship status, is obvious. Permitting such seemingly benign questions has led to the type of targeting expressly forbidden by state and federal fair housing laws. In 2012, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development issued an “Immigration and Housing Status FAQ [Frequently Asked Questions]” which provided that: “A person’s immigration status does not affect his or her federal fair housing rights...” and that “[i]f they [landlords] ask for information from one person or group, they must ask for the same information from all applicants and tenants. Potential renters and home buyers cannot be treated differently because of their race, color, national origin...” These bills would prevent landlords from acting upon fears and misconceptions about racial and ethnic minorities.

The Commission supports these bills because they would encourage compliance with the mandates and intent of the state's Fair Housing Practices Act and the federal Fair Housing Act.

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