

Testimony in Opposition to H 5677

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 opposition to passage of H 5677. 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.

Rents are on the rise. The average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in the state is \$2,107.¹ As we wrote in our support of H 5127, the Providence Journal recently noted, at least one real estate company recently rated the Providence metro area as the least affordable rental market in the entire country.² A primary driver for this rise in unaffordability is prices being driven upward by a shortage in supply combined with wages and earnings that have not risen to keep pace. As the article notes, “[t]he gap between real income versus income needed to pay rent is widest here.” Nobody feels this pressure more than low income Rhode Islanders who may not qualify for, or having been waiting for years for entry into, federally subsidized housing. Far too many of our friends and neighbors are one financial interruption or unexpected expense away from not being able to pay rent. Many more feel that moving is a near impossibility as apartments they can afford simply do not exist in this market.

This bill will increase evictions and homelessness in the state. Often, our clients face eviction because they are not able to find an affordable apartment within the scant 30 or so days they are

¹ Housing Works RI, 2024 Housing Fact Book at 40.

² Providence Journal, *Redfin ranks Providence as the least affordable metro area for renters. Here's why*, Nish Kohli, Feb. 19, 2025 (last accessed on March 17, 2025)

<https://www.providencejournal.com/story/news/local/2025/02/19/providence-is-the-least-affordable-metro-area-for-renters-redfin-ranks/79069023007/>

currently provided by state law.³ The short supply of apartments generally, and affordable apartments acutely and specifically, combined with rising rent prices means that under the current state of the law a tenant may be required to save three times the amount of monthly rent, first month, last month, and a deposit in the amount of one month's rent. This bill would allow for the amount of the security deposit to double and would authorize a landlord to demand as much prepaid rent as someone will accept. Even assuming that the prevailing rental agreement will ask only for first month's rent, last month's rent, and a security deposit, a renter in Rhode Island will have to save over \$8,000 to move. Many people will not be able to afford this increased cost, leading them to eviction court and quite possibly homelessness.

No one benefits by placing such severe constraints on tenants ability to move. Importantly, this bill would most negatively impact those struggling Rhode Islanders who can least afford another mounting cost. We could not be more emphatic in our recommendation that this committee oppose bringing this bill to a vote on the floor. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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³ R.I.G.L. § 34-18-37 allows for a landlord to terminate a tenancy and demand a month-to-month tenant surrender possession of an apartment by delivering a notice at least 30 days before the proposed date of termination.