

Roberta DiMezza

From: Robert Vennerbeck <vbob@whipplestreet.net>
Sent: Sunday, March 16, 2025 11:12 AM
To: House Judiciary Committee
Subject: SUPPORT H5917, H5918, & H 5906 Changes to Lead & Registry

Dear Committee Clerk DiMezza,

As a small time landlord of retirement age, I looked forward to keeping up with minor maintenance and repairs for my tenants, who are also my neighbors and my friends - not being challenged and confused by erratic registries and over-zealous requirements. We've never had any children here, nor any expecting young ladies, and strongly support the notion that we should be relieved of some of these requirements, as we are not putting anyone 'at risk'.

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed adjustments to Rhode Island's rental housing compliance regulations. These reforms will bring our state into alignment with neighboring jurisdictions, streamline compliance oversight, ensure fair treatment of landlords and tenants, and ultimately increase the availability of safe rental housing.

Alignment with Neighboring States (Massachusetts & Connecticut):The proposed changes will harmonize Rhode Island's policies with those of Massachusetts and Connecticut, ensuring consistency for property owners and tenants across state lines. By removing inspection and registry requirements for properties that do not contain lead-based paint and do not house children under six or pregnant individuals, the policy will focus resources where they are most needed—on properties with lead-based paint hazards and at-risk occupants. This will enhance housing safety while creating a more equitable regulatory environment for landlords and tenants alike.

Centralized Compliance Oversight:Streamlining enforcement under the Rhode Island Department of Health will eliminate redundancies and inefficiencies caused by involving multiple municipal authorities. A centralized compliance framework will allow for better allocation of resources, ensuring that enforcement targets willful non-compliance rather than placing undue burdens on responsible landlords. This reform will improve effectiveness and fairness in addressing housing safety.

Changes to Eviction Provisions:Removing the eviction ban for non-payment in non-compliant units is a critical step toward balancing landlord and tenant responsibilities. Landlords rely on rental income to maintain and improve properties, including addressing compliance issues. Allowing tenants to remain in non-compliant units without paying rent neither improves housing safety nor ensures fairness. Additionally, proposed escrow law updates will empower judges with discretion to release funds for necessary repairs while maintaining essential tenant protections. These changes provide a reasonable solution to encourage compliance without causing financial hardship for landlords.

Rental Registry Rollout Adjustments: A delay in implementation and fines until at least October 2025 is a prudent step to allow for an orderly transition and address logistical challenges. Moreover, clarifying registry requirements to reflect the contact information of the actual leasing party (owner or property manager) ensures accuracy. Limiting registry access to tenants and authorized municipal or government agencies protects landlord privacy and mitigates the risk of identity theft while still ensuring necessary transparency.

Flexibility for Renovations: Providing landlords the ability to regain possession of properties for necessary renovations without fear of retaliation claims is a common-sense measure. There are situations where renovations cannot be safely conducted with tenants in place. This change ensures that property owners can make essential improvements while maintaining fair protections for tenants.

Safe Harbor Provision for Property Sales: Granting new owners of pre-1978 properties a 60-day grace period to achieve lead law compliance is a forward-thinking policy. Imposing immediate liability on new owners could discourage property transactions and hinder investments in older housing stock. This provision strikes a balance between encouraging compliance and supporting a healthy real estate market by preventing chilling effects associated with immediate penalties.

In conclusion, these proposed adjustments reflect a fair and balanced approach to rental housing compliance. They align Rhode Island's policies with neighboring states, focus enforcement where it is needed most, and create a more sustainable regulatory framework. I urge the committee to support these changes to promote safe, accessible, and fair rental housing throughout Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

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