



Miguel A. Sanchez

Majority Whip

Committee on Public Works, Vice-Chair

Rules Committee, Vice-Chair

Committee on Environment and Resiliency, Vice-Chair

Special Committee on Health, Opportunity, Prosperity and Equity, Member

Committee on Finance, Member

Councilor – Ward 6

Representative Robert D. Craven, Jr.
Chair, Committee on Judiciary
Rhode Island House of Representatives
82 Smith Street Providence, RI 02903

Dear Honorable Chair Craven and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am writing this letter to strongly oppose House Bill 5919, which would characterize squatting as a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of up to \$1,000, imprisonment for up to a year, or both.

Protecting tenants and property owners is crucial, but this bill's approach to deterring squatters risks unintended consequences. Additionally, it is unclear from available data that squatting is prevalent enough in Rhode Island to justify this explicit criminalization of what is often the last resort for our unhoused neighbors. Ultimately, this bill would cause more harm than good.

This is particularly true given the factors that contribute to squatting, such as systemic poverty and the lack of affordable housing. Laws such as the proposed amendments in H5919 do not deter squatting but instead increase harm to unhoused individuals, result in more law enforcement interactions, and create greater barriers to housing and employment by burdening residents with unnecessary criminal records. Rather than penalizing individuals who almost certainly cannot afford fines, or subjecting them to incarceration, tenants and property owners would be better served by legislation aimed at lowering the cost of living, increasing affordable housing options, and maintaining existing housing stock to prevent buildings from falling into disrepair.

Ultimately, this bill's negative consequences render it inhumane and unproductive. It wastes meaningful time that would be better spent genuinely enhancing the welfare of tenants and property owners and disproportionately harms our most vulnerable residents by establishing such a severe penalty. I urge you not to pass H5919 and instead support humane legislation that protects all Rhode Islanders.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Miguel Sanchez", is written over a horizontal line.

Miguel Sanchez
Majority Whip
Councilor – Ward 6

Providence City Council

Providence City Hall, 25 Dorrance Street, Providence, RI 02903

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