

**Roberta DiMezza**

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**From:** Peter Somerville <user@votervoice.net>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 18, 2025 11:45 PM  
**To:** House Judiciary Committee  
**Subject:** OPPOSE 5921

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
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Dear Committee Clerk DiMezza,

This would call additional hardship on landlords trying to maintain properties and pay for the steady rising utilities to keep the properties up and running

Please oppose Rhode Island House Bill 5921, which allows tenants to withhold rent payments and place them into an escrow account if a housing code enforcement officer issues a second notice of violation. The money in the escrow maybe awarded by the court to the tenant as an abatement of rent. We oppose this bill because it could create financial instability, making it harder to cover essential expenses like mortgages, property taxes, and maintenance. Without steady rental income, landlords may struggle to address the very violations cited, potentially worsening housing conditions.

The bill also raises concerns about potential abuse, as some tenants could exploit this provision by exaggerating minor issues to justify withholding rent, leading to unnecessary disputes.

Existing laws already provide tenants with options to address unresolved code violations, such as reporting landlords to housing authorities or pursuing legal action. Adding another layer of regulation may be unnecessary and redundant. This bill could also discourage property investment, as the risk of rent withholding may make rental housing less attractive to current and prospective landlords, reducing the availability of affordable housing.

The lack of clear guidelines on inconsistent enforcement, make it difficult for landlords to determine when rent withholding is justified. While the bill is intended to hold landlords accountable for maintaining habitable housing, it could create unintended consequences that destabilize the rental market and make it harder for property owners to operate successfully. There are other questions as to who establishes this escrow account and who controls it?

Sincerely,

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