

To: Senator Matthew LaMountain, Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee
Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

From: Julia Keefe, 3L Roger Williams University School of Law

Date: April 21, 2025

Re: Support for House Bill 6160, Survivor Early Lease Termination

I am writing in Support of House Bill 6160 as it would be an important step in expanding domestic violence considerations in private housing. Many looking to flee abusive situations face significant barriers outside the abuse they are facing. There are financial, emotional, logistical, and even potentially criminally implications that could come from someone simply seeking safety. This bill is late in Rhode Island. It is important to note that 41 states have early lease termination laws for survivors and 19 states have tenant lock-change laws for survivors. The consideration of domestic violence in private housing is critical because the federal policies in place like the Violence Against Women's Act and the Fair Housing Act do not adequately protect victims of domestic violence in private housing. Domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness and survivors face very limited options when looking to leave an abusive situation. Rhode Island has the opportunity, with this legislation, to remove a heavy barrier for a domestic violence victim.

A coalition of Rhode Island survivors, domestic and sexual violence victim service providers, and advocates come together to champion this bill, based on similar laws from our neighboring New England states, all of whom already have this safe housing law.

The Key important provisions include:

- A prohibition on evictions, fees, and other penalties for abuse survivors who terminate their lease to flee for their safety.
- A prohibition on landlords disclosing confidential information obtained from survivors.
- A variety of methods survivors can use to verify their status with written documentation, including self-certification as found in other RI domestic abuse safety laws.

This bill pairs the interests of survivors with those of private landlords for a ultimate goal of safety and autonomy for individuals.

I sincerely appreciate your consideration and urge you to pass the bill this year.

Gratefully,

Julia Keefe