



Rhode Island Association of REALTORS® & State-Wide MLS

March 16, 2026
The Honorable Rep. Carol McEntee
House Judiciary Committee
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: AN ACT RELATING TO FAIR HOUSING PRACTICES ACT

Dear Chairperson and Committee Members:

On behalf of the Rhode Island Association of REALTORS® (RIAR), we respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to H7034. RIAR represents more than 5,900 licensed real estate professionals who work every day in the listing, sale, leasing, management, and appraisal of residential and commercial real estate and who are committed to stable housing markets, to make Rhode Island a better place to call home.

RIAR strongly supports fair housing protections and equal access to housing opportunities. However, H7034 raises significant concerns regarding housing provider liability, tenant safety, and the practical ability of property owners to evaluate risk in rental housing.

Removes a Key Tool for Evaluating Resident Safety

Housing providers must make decisions that protect the safety and well-being of other tenants and neighboring residents. Prohibiting any inquiry into an applicant's prior incarceration, H7034 may:

- Prevent landlords from evaluating relevant criminal history related to violent or dangerous conduct
- Limit the ability of housing providers to assess potential risks to other residents
- Increase exposure to liability if a landlord unknowingly rents to an individual with a serious criminal history

Responsible screening practices help maintain safe residential communities and protect both tenants and property owners.

Increases Liability Exposure for Housing Providers

Property owners are responsible for maintaining safe premises and may face legal exposure if foreseeable harm occurs.

Without the ability to evaluate relevant background information, landlords may face:

- Increased risk of negligent leasing claims
- Difficulty demonstrating reasonable screening practices in the event of a dispute
- Greater uncertainty in evaluating tenant applications

Housing providers should retain the ability to consider relevant information when making responsible rental decisions.

Undermines Established Tenant Screening Practices

Many housing providers rely on consistent and objective screening criteria to evaluate applicants fairly. H7034 may create uncertainty by:

- Preventing the use of commonly accepted background screening practices
- Limiting the ability of landlords to apply consistent risk-based screening standards
- Creating confusion regarding how housing providers can lawfully evaluate tenant applications

Clear and workable screening standards are essential for fair and predictable housing operations.

A More Balanced Policy Approach Is Needed

RIAR recognizes the importance of supporting successful reentry and reducing barriers to housing for individuals leaving the criminal justice system. However, these policies should also preserve reasonable screening tools for housing providers.

A more balanced approach could:

- Allow consideration of serious or recent criminal activity that may pose safety risks
- Provide clear guidance on permissible screening practices
- Align state policy with existing federal fair housing guidance on criminal history screening

Such an approach could expand housing access while maintaining necessary protections for tenants and housing providers.

Conclusion

RIAR supports fair housing protections and efforts to expand access to housing opportunities. However, H7034 removes an important screening tool used by housing providers and raises concerns related to safety, liability, and practical implementation.

For these reasons, the Rhode Island Association of REALTORS® respectfully urges the Committee to oppose H7034.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Trevor J. Chasse
Director, Government Affairs
Rhode Island Association of REALTORS®