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From: bounce@bounce.votervoice.net on behalf of Scott Gaudreau <sgaudreau@pag-cdg.com>
Sent: Monday, March 16, 2026 12:16 PM
To: House Judiciary Committee
Subject: OPPOSE H7034 - Making Criminals a Protected Class

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Dear Committee Clerk DiMezza,

Rhode Island House Bill 7034, which prohibits landlords from inquiring about or discriminating against applicants based on prior incarceration, could have negative consequences for both landlords and tenants by limiting landlords' ability to properly screen tenants and maintain safe, stable housing environments. This bill prohibits landlords from asking a prospective tenant for their previous address. Without that information a credit and background check cannot be completed.

How This Hurts Landlords:

Increased Risk & Liability - Landlords would be forced to rent without knowing if a potential tenant has a criminal background that could pose safety concerns for neighbors and other tenants.

Property Damage & Non-Payment Risk - Some criminal offenses (such as fraud or property crimes) may indicate a higher likelihood of lease violations, unpaid rent, or damage to rental units. Without access to incarceration history, landlords cannot fully assess risk.

Insurance & Legal Issues - If landlords cannot screen for incarceration history, they may face higher premiums or legal liability if a tenant with a violent history harms another tenant or the property.

Reduced Control Over Property - Private property owners should have the right to vet tenants who will live in their buildings. This bill removes landlords' discretion in making informed decisions.

How This Hurts Other Tenants & Communities:

Safety Concerns - Existing tenants may feel unsafe if landlords are unable to consider criminal history when selecting renters. In cases involving violent crimes, this could lead to higher crime rates in rental properties.

Tenant Retention Issues - If responsible, long-term tenants feel unsafe due to questionable rental decisions, they may move elsewhere, leading to higher turnover rates and instability in rental communities.

Discourages New Housing Development - If landlords face more restrictions on screening, they may choose to convert rental properties into condominiums or short-term rentals, reducing the overall rental supply and increasing rents.

In conclusion, while the bill intends to prevent discrimination against individuals with a criminal record, it undermines landlords' ability to ensure safe and reliable tenancies and may lead to unintended negative consequences, such as higher rental costs, safety risks, and reduced housing availability. A better solution would be balanced legislation that allows for rehabilitation while still giving landlords the ability to make informed decisions about their properties.

Sincerely,

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