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To: House Judiciary Committee, RI General Assembly
Re: Opposition for H7559 and H7560
Date: 3/17/26

Dear Chair McEntee and members of the committee,

Thank you for considering our testimony.

My name is DeeAnn Guo, and I am a community organizer with the Childhood Lead Action Project, which is a non-profit founded in 1992, dedicated to the elimination of lead poisoning in RI through parent support, education, and grassroots organizing.

We **oppose** H7559 and H7560.

Versions of these bills were introduced last year, and we had spoken against them then. Because the proposed bills are largely the same this year, I will have to repeat many of the same points.

Last year, the General Assembly chose to maintain our lead protections for Rhode Islanders. We urge you to do the same this year.

7560 - Lead Hazard Mitigation Act

This law has been in place for over 20 years. Adding an exemption from lead safety requirements for rental properties that do not house an at-risk occupant (meaning a child under the age of 6 or someone who is pregnant) is illogical.

A major purpose of the law when it was passed by the General Assembly 20 years ago was to establish a general lead safety standard for pre-1978 rental housing across the board, regardless of at-risk occupancy.

Children do not stay in one home for their entire childhood— they may visit family and friends, families move, and people who are not currently pregnant may decide to have children.

Additionally, while it is true that younger children are the most at risk for lead poisoning, lead is a toxin that can negatively impact neurological, cardiovascular and reproductive health in all members of a household, from older children to adults and even to pets.

We should encourage a safety standard for all rental housing, regardless of who is living inside.

This proposal also would unintentionally lead to the quiet discrimination against families with children looking to rent as a way to skirt around the lead inspection requirement. Asking for permission to leave lead hazards in a home because children aren't there currently shows a lack of respect for the current occupants and indicates a clear intention to refuse to provide housing to families in the future.

7559 - Rental registry

As for the rental registry, this is something that has already made a big impact. The General Assembly made the choice to make this a statewide requirement in 2023, and it was a good decision.

Since the registry was implemented in 2024, according to data provided by the Rhode Island Department of Health, the rate of lead certificate issuances per month have more than doubled, and we are at around 30% statewide compliance. While that may seem low, it is a big jump from less than 10% compliance, which is where we were before the rental registry. This represents thousands of units that have been made lead safe for Rhode Island residents.

The benefit of the rental registry goes beyond lead safety. It is a transparency and consumer protection measure. We have a business registry, and this acts like an extension of that, since being a landlord is fundamentally a business.

This is no more invasive in terms of information collected and shared with the public, and it has helped countless people gain insight into who their landlord is outside of shell companies and LLCs. And it has helped to facilitate more efficient communications between tenants and landlords. Limiting the registry's transparency and its scope undercuts what makes it so effective.

We have seen that landlords respond the most when their wallet is potentially impacted, and strategically withholding rent is one of the only tools a tenant has. The protection from evictions due to nonpayment of rent is really key to the power of this legislation; we should not walk it back.

Absolutely, we need to make sure property owners have the help they need to make their properties safe from lead hazards, including financial help such as the existing lead abatement tax credit and several grant and loan programs for lead-related repairs. Instead of seeing the cost of lead safety as justification for allowing homes to be hazardous, we should be approaching this from a more supportive perspective, such as finding ways to expand eligibility for financial assistance programs.

The General Assembly kept our laws intact to protect children from lead poisoning last year; it was the right decision then and it's the right decision now.

Sincerely,
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