

**RE: Strong Support for H 8066 – Clarifying and Criminalizing Squatting**

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Gregory J. Rice, and I am a Rhode Island property owner and housing provider responsible for managing and maintaining residential housing within our state. I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 8066, which addresses the growing problem of unlawful squatting in residential properties.

This legislation is a necessary and common-sense reform that restores balance between legitimate tenant protections and the fundamental rights of property owners.

For too long, Rhode Island law has allowed individuals who have no legal tenancy, no rental agreement, and no authorization from a property owner to exploit legal ambiguity and remain in homes they do not own or rent. In practice, this has forced property owners to endure lengthy and costly civil eviction proceedings against individuals who were never tenants in the first place.

That outcome is both illogical and unjust.

H 8066 appropriately clarifies that:

- A squatter is not a tenant
- Squatting is a criminal act, not a civil dispute
- Property owners should be able to seek assistance from law enforcement to remove trespassers

These provisions restore a basic legal principle: someone who breaks into or unlawfully occupies a home should not gain legal leverage over the rightful owner of that property.

This bill also protects legitimate tenants by preserving the existing eviction process for lawful occupants, ensuring that individuals who entered a property under a rental agreement continue to receive the protections afforded under Rhode Island's landlord-tenant law.

In other words, the bill carefully distinguishes between:

- Tenants with legal rights
- Trespassers attempting to exploit legal loopholes

That distinction is critical.

Across the country, many states have begun strengthening laws against squatting because of the serious harm it causes to property owners, neighborhoods, and housing availability. When property owners are unable to quickly regain control of unlawfully occupied homes, the consequences often include:

- Property damage and vandalism
- Unsafe living conditions
- Increased costs that ultimately raise rents for legitimate tenants
- Delays in returning housing units to the market

Rhode Island already faces a significant housing shortage, and policies that make it more difficult for property owners to protect their property only discourage investment in housing supply.

By clarifying the law and empowering law enforcement to respond appropriately, H 8066 sends an important message that Rhode Island supports lawful property rights, responsible housing providers, and safe communities.

Simply put, no individual should be allowed to take possession of someone else's home without permission and then force the owner into a months-long legal process to regain it.

H 8066 restores fairness, clarity, and accountability.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to support and advance this legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,



Gregory J. Rice

VP/GM – Nexus Property Management