

## H 8108 Written Testimony – Hugo Vesper, 03/18/2026

I live in the city of Pawtucket, in a small apartment building with six units including my own. Just over a month ago, the rent of my neighbors in the building was increased by 44% by our new landlord. This was hard for us to swallow. In fact, for most of us it was impossible. Of the six households at my address, four of them are being forced out after living here for over a decade. One of these units is home to a family with two children, one of whom is an infant. I've seen the cost of rent throughout the metro area and the broader state of Rhode Island – I've visited many of the apartments on the market this past year. I know this family will have to squeeze together and sacrifice some of the few comforts they had in order to put a roof over their children. I don't know where they'll end up, but I know it will be hard.

Because their rent spiked by 44%, my neighbors are being forced out of the homes where they built their families and settled into their careers. If House bill 8108 had been passed a decade ago, limiting rent increases to 4% per year, I believe this shock to their lives could have been avoided. It's a simple fact of our economy that people prefer to make financial decisions in the margins: they are ready and willing to change their budgets according to their needs, so long as they can do so incrementally. Limiting rent increases to 4% per year grants tenants the chance to make long-term, lasting changes to their lifestyles in order to properly adapt to rising costs. When you know rent is increasing by 4% year after year, you can plan for it. You can figure out where your budget can be tightened, and where it can't. You can work towards a raise. You can seek a promotion. You can get the training or certification needed for an additional part-time job, so that you can continue supporting your family's needs. You can safely invest in short-term expenses like a bicycle, a car, a computer, or a business suit in order to achieve a higher income in the long-term. You can evolve and adapt.

The last time my neighbors' rent was increased was ten years ago. A back-of-the-napkin calculation shows us that on average, their rent has increased by 4.4% per year in the past decade. When you consider that insurance and municipal tax rates have had their own increases during that time—conditions that qualify a landlord for rent hikes greater than 4%—it becomes clear that our landlord could have met all the requirements put forth in H 8108, giving us a chance to adapt over time, without losing out on increased revenue. In fact, if our rent had been increased by 4.4% every year, the overall revenue gained by our landlord after ten years would have been far greater than what will *actually* be gained this year after a sudden 44% increase.

I think it's safe to assume that many property owners will make a yearly 4% rent increase standard policy once this bill passes into law. I don't think that's a real problem for anyone. To a tenant, knowing that your rent will change in a steady pattern over the course of the next decade gives you time to strategize and adapt. To a landlord, this is also true! A property owner can better plan their expenses (both business and personal) much further in advance when they can rely on a steady pattern of rent increases. In a new housing ecosystem where regular, marginal rent increases are common, the exceptions to the 4% limit granted by House bill 8108 will provide an incentive for landlords to perform important repairs and renovations *before* their units become unlivable and their tenants complain of an emergency. This bill says to property owners, "Raising the rent gradually over time is your right. But if you're going to make cost of living spike overnight, you need to justify it with meaningful improvements to quality of life."

Right now, what tenants in my building are experiencing is a financial shock that they had no way to ready themselves for. The social contract between tenants and property owners is broken: My neighbors and I experience flooding, gas leaks, and infestations of rats and mold; when the rent shot up by 44% last month, we had no hope that it would go towards fixing up our building, and no leverage to ensure that it would. Just one more reason for my neighbors to abandon the homes they've grown into.

Rent surges don't just push people out of their apartments; one of my neighbors has to move down to Florida to live with his sister, because there's no clear alternative for him to stay in Rhode Island. Sudden surges in rent are pushing Rhode Islanders—good, friendly, hard-working, pay-the-rent-on-time Rhode Islanders—out. Without enforceable rent stabilization, such surges will inevitably hollow out the state's cultural and demographic core.

Making Rhode Island's rent inflation stable and predictable will benefit both tenants and their landlords. I'm here to support bill 8108 because I think everyone deserves the chance to prepare and plan for their financial future.

~ Hugo Vesper  
Pawtucket, RI