

Ariana Costa

From: Jeremy Booth <jeremybooth@cox.net>
Sent: Monday, March 16, 2026 9:57 AM
To: House Judiciary Committee
Subject: Written opposition H8108

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Completed

Subject

Opposition to H 8108 – Rent Stabilization ActOpposition to H 8108 – Rent Stabilization Act

Dear Chair and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I am writing in strong opposition to House Bill H 8108, which proposes to amend Chapter 34-18 of the Residential Landlord and Tenant Act by imposing a statewide 4% annual rent cap and related restrictions.

As a rental property owner in Rhode Island, I fully support fair housing practices and reasonable tenant protections. However, H 8108, as drafted, would create significant operational and financial strain on housing providers while failing to address the underlying drivers of housing costs in our state.

1. Arbitrary 4% Cap Does Not Reflect Actual Cost Increases

Section 34-18-63(a)(3) would prohibit rent increases exceeding 4% within any twelve-month period, absent a formal exemption. In practice, property taxes, insurance premiums, utilities, compliance costs, and maintenance expenses frequently increase at rates well above 4%. In recent years, insurance premiums in particular have risen sharply, and municipal tax reassessments can significantly alter annual carrying costs.

While subsection (e) provides for exemptions related to taxes, insurance, and health and safety improvements, requiring landlords to petition the Secretary of Housing for relief adds administrative burden, delays, and uncertainty. Small, independent property owners—who comprise a substantial portion of Rhode Island’s rental housing stock—often lack the time and legal resources to navigate exemption proceedings.

2. Restrictions on Resetting Rent Between Tenancies

Subsections (c) and (d) would prohibit a landlord from resetting rent more than 4% between tenancies in certain circumstances. This provision effectively imposes vacancy control, a policy that has historically discouraged investment in rental housing and reduced mobility in the market.

The ability to reset rent between tenancies is a key mechanism that allows property owners to gradually align below-market units with prevailing market conditions. Removing this flexibility disincentivizes property upgrades and long-term capital improvements, particularly in older housing stock.

3. Increased Litigation Risk and Penalties

Section (f) establishes liability of three months' rent, plus actual damages, attorneys' fees, and potential punitive damages for violations. While accountability is appropriate for willful misconduct, the breadth of these remedies—combined with complex compliance requirements—creates substantial litigation exposure for inadvertent errors.

For small landlords operating one to three units, even a single dispute could be financially devastating. This risk may encourage owners to exit the rental market altogether, further reducing available housing supply.

4. Impact on Housing Supply and Investment

Rhode Island's housing challenges stem primarily from constrained supply, regulatory barriers to development, and rising construction costs. Rent caps do not increase supply; instead, they can reduce new investment and defer maintenance.

When revenue growth is artificially constrained while expenses continue to rise, landlords are forced to make difficult decisions—delaying improvements, converting properties to other uses, or selling to larger institutional operators better positioned to absorb regulatory complexity. None of these outcomes benefit tenants in the long term.

5. Alternative Policy Approaches

If the General Assembly's goal is housing affordability, more effective measures would include:

- Incentivizing new housing development;
- Streamlining zoning and permitting processes;
- Expanding housing voucher programs;
- Offering targeted tax relief for owner-occupied and small rental properties.

Policies that increase supply and reduce operating costs will produce sustainable affordability without distorting market signals.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to oppose H 8108. While well-intentioned, this legislation would likely reduce housing availability, discourage maintenance and investment, and ultimately harm both tenants and small property owners.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Booth
21 Murphy Cir
Middletown, RI 02842
Rental Property Owner
Rhode Island

Jeremy Booth

(401)480-8855
JeremyBooth@cox.net