



March 17, 2026

Re: Testimony in Support of HB 8141

To: Chair McEntee, First Vice Chair Knight, Second Vice Chair Dawson, and members of the Rhode Island House Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to state our support for, and provide a national perspective on, HB 8141, The Residential Tenant's Right to Legal Representation Act. By passing this bill, Rhode Island would become the sixth state and 28th jurisdiction to provide a basic but highly effective protection for tenants, joining nearby jurisdictions Maryland, New York City, and Connecticut. HB 8141 comes at a critical time: a [Providence report](#) found Rhode Island experienced a 33% increase in homelessness between 2023 and 2024 while experiencing the highest rent increases in the nation around the same time.

The National Coalition for a Civil Right to Counsel (NCCRC) is a project of The Public Justice Center (PJC), an organization based in Maryland that pursues systemic change to build a just society and uses legal advocacy tools to pursue social justice, economic and race equity, and fundamental human rights for people who are struggling to provide for their basic needs. The PJC houses the NCCRC which seeks to ensure individuals have a right to effective counsel when facing the loss of their basic human needs in the civil legal system thus advancing collective power in pursuit of systemic change. The NCCRC has been involved in all [twenty-seven successful eviction right to counsel enactments to date](#), and we are currently supporting efforts in over 60 other cities, counties, and states around the country.

Eviction cases have the potential to implicate every basic human need a family can have: safety, mental and physical health, child custody, employment, education, and so on. Yet our [national data](#) shows that on average only 4% of tenants have access to counsel, compared to 84% of landlords. This disparity has led to the evictions process becoming a pro forma procedure devoid of due process that nearly always yields the same result regardless of the facts or law. In Baltimore, where only 1% of tenants had representation prior to the passage of a right to counsel, a [report by The Public Justice Center](#) found that 80% of tenants had a potential defense to eviction but only 8% successfully did so without representation.

Conversely, where a right to counsel for tenants facing eviction has been enacted, tenants have stayed in their homes or otherwise improved their housing stability. In [New York City](#), the first to provide such a right and the city with the most evictions in the country, a [2024 report](#) from the Office of Civil Justice found that for those tenants receiving full representation, between 72-93% of represented households (depending on the borough) were able to remain in their homes. [San Francisco](#) saw a 10% filing rate drop in just one year, and 92% of tenants assisted by the RTC avoided homelessness, while 63% of those receiving full representation could stay in their homes. In [Cleveland](#), of the 89% of RTC clients who had the goal of preventing an eviction or

involuntary move, that goal was met 81% of the time, while 88% of those who sought 30 or more days to move were able to obtain that relief.

Even in cases where there are no apparent legal defenses, lawyers take critical action to help tenants secure future housing by obtaining extra time to move (which also helps ensure tenants do not lose their belongings), reducing rent arrears, and negotiating to have the eviction not on the tenant's record. A [California study](#) found **where tenants had to move, 71% of represented tenants had obtained a new rental unit one year later, compared to only 43% of pro se tenants.** And in [New Orleans](#), roughly 30% of those who had to move had at least 2 weeks to do so, which is a critical amount of time to avoid homelessness and the loss of belongings.

Lastly, the state stands to reap significant financial benefits from expanding tenant representation. Stout, a financial analysis company that has produced reports in a number of cities, has [consistently found](#) not only that a right to counsel leads to more than 90% of tenants avoiding disruptive displacement, but that a right to counsel saves millions more than it costs up front. For instance, a [Philadelphia report](#) found that a \$3.5 million investment in right to counsel would yield \$45 million in savings. In Cleveland, a [report](#) estimated that “Cleveland and Cuyahoga County likely realized combined economic benefits of between \$11.8 million and \$14 million from July 1, 2020 through December 31, 2022. During the same period, the total investment in RTC-C was \$4.5 million, resulting in an estimated return on investment of between \$2.62 and \$3.11.”

We applaud HB 8141's provision of full legal representation for those tenants who are income eligible, as studies have shown that full representation provides vastly better results. For instance, a [California study](#) found that tenants with full representation stayed in their units three times as often as those receiving limited legal assistance or no legal assistance, and none of the full representation tenants paid their landlords anything, compared to over 50% of tenants with limited assistance. When tenants did have to move, the fully represented tenants were given twice as long to do so. We are happy to answer any questions you may have, as we have done for policymakers in many other jurisdictions. Thank you for your consideration of this important bill.

Sincerely,



John Pollock
Coordinator, National Coalition for a Civil Right to Counsel
Attorney, Public Justice Center