



March 18, 2026
The Honorable Rep. Carol McEntee
House Judiciary Committee
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: H8141- AN ACT RELATING TO RESIDENTIAL TENANT’S RIGHT TO LEGAL REPRESENTATION ACT

Dear Chairperson and Committee Members:

On behalf of the Rhode Island Association of REALTORS® (RIAR), we respectfully submit this testimony in opposition of H8141. RIAR represents more than 5,900 licensed real estate professionals who list, sell, lease, manage, and appraise residential and commercial real estate to make Rhode Island a better place to call home.

RIAR supports policies that promote fair and stable housing for Rhode Island residents. However, we have concerns about certain provisions of this legislation that may create unintended consequences for housing providers and the broader rental market.

Public Reporting of Landlords in Eviction Proceedings

RIAR has concerns with §34-18.3-5(c)(xii), which requires the annual report issued by the Division of Civil Representation to include: “A list of landlords involved in eviction proceedings.”

Potential Reputational Harm

- Publishing a list of landlords involved in eviction proceedings could unfairly damage their reputation.
- Eviction filing does not necessarily reflect misconduct by the landlord and may simply reflect nonpayment of rent or other lawful lease enforcement.

Lack of Context

- Eviction filings may occur for many reasons including:
 - Persistent nonpayment of rent
 - Lease violations
 - Illegal activity in a unit
 - Safety concerns for other tenants
- Publicly listing landlords could misrepresent routine legal actions as problematic behavior.

Risk of Discouraging Housing Providers

- The rental housing market relies heavily on small property owners; many only own one or two rental units.
- Policies that publicly identify landlords utilizing a legal process may discourage continued participation.

Potential Chilling Effect on Lawful Enforcement of Leases

- Landlords may become reluctant to pursue legitimate eviction proceedings that result in public listing.
- Creating situations where housing providers hesitate to enforce lease terms that protect property condition, safety, or other tenants.

Concerns Regarding Non-Needs-Based Legal Assistance

H8141 establishes a right to legal representation for tenants in covered proceedings without clear income or financial eligibility requirements. This raises concerns regarding fairness and program design:

- State funded legal assistance could be provided regardless of the tenant's financial circumstances.
- Tenants with significant financial resources could receive free legal representation, while small housing providers may still be required to pay for legal counsel out of pocket.
- Many Rhode Island landlords are individual property owners and already face substantial costs navigating eviction proceedings.

A program intended to assist vulnerable residents may be more appropriately structured if eligibility is based on demonstrated financial need.

Significant Administrative and Implementation Burdens

H8141 creates a new department responsible for implementation and administration and would require:

- Extensive annual reporting
- Statewide outreach programs
- Coordination with designated legal and community organizations

The scope of these requirements may create significant administrative and financial burdens.

Importance of Education and Training for All Parties

The bill includes outreach and education programs designed to inform tenants of their rights. RIAR believes that education should also be available to landlords. Providing training opportunities for landlords could:

- Improve understanding of landlord-tenant laws and legal obligations
- Help prevent unintentional violations of housing regulations
- Reduce disputes and misunderstandings between landlords and tenants
- Encourage compliance and better communication within the rental housing market

Education that is open to both tenants and landlords helps reduce conflicts and improve housing stability.

Potential Impact on Rhode Island's Housing Market

Policies that create additional regulatory burdens or reputational risks for housing providers may unintentionally:

- Discourage small property owners from offering rental housing
- Increase operating costs associated with managing rental property
- Reduce the availability of rental units in an already constrained market

Primary Concern with Public Identification of Landlords

RIAR respectfully urges the removal or substantially revision of §34-18.3-5(c)(xii) to eliminate the requirement that the state publish a list of landlords involved in eviction proceedings.

Eviction filings are a lawful component of the landlord-tenant legal process and should not, by themselves, create reputational risk for housing providers.

Conclusion

RIAR appreciates the goal of supporting housing stability and access to legal resources. However, the provisions described above raise concerns that could negatively affect housing providers and the broader rental market.

For these reasons, the Rhode Island Association of REALTORS® respectfully urges the Committee to oppose H8141 as currently drafted to address these concerns.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Trevor J. Chasse". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Trevor J. Chasse
Advocacy Manager
Rhode Island Association of REALTORS®