



March 18, 2026

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

RE: H 8215: AN ACT RELATING TO PROPERTY -- RHODE ISLAND FAIR HOUSING PRACTICES ACT

Dear Chairperson and Committee Members:

On behalf of the Rhode Island Association of REALTORS® (RIAR), we respectfully submit this testimony in support of H 8215. RIAR represents more than 5,900 licensed real estate professionals who work every day to list, sell, lease, manage, and appraise residential and commercial real estate to make Rhode Island a better place to call home.

Imagine that you own a rental property that you have recently renovated and installed new carpeting. Due to the renovations, you prohibit tenants from having pets. A month after the tenant moves in, you drive by the property and notice two pit bulls looking out the window and barking. When you question the tenant, he or she claims without documentation that the dogs are “support animals.” When you challenge the tenant’s claim, the tenant threatens to report you for discrimination.

Unfortunately, scenarios like these have become increasingly common. Questions about support animals are the most frequently asked fair housing questions that RIAR receives from our members. Other property managers have had experiences with tenants who claim that animals ranging from snakes and tarantulas to parrots and ducks are support animals.

Rental applicants and tenants who falsely claim that a pet is a support animal to circumvent a landlord’s “no pets” rule hurt tenants with disabilities who legitimately need assistance from a support animal or a trained service animal. H 8215 would impose reasonable standards to make it more difficult to commit fraud while still protecting tenants with disabilities.

▪**Defines service and support animals** - H 8215 distinguishes between service animals, which are individually trained dogs, and support animals, which are not required to be trained.

▪**Pet policies** - Some landlords and condominium associations prohibit or regulate the size of pets due to concerns about potential damage, odors, barking, and the safety of other tenants, in some situations. Also, many liability insurance companies specifically exclude certain breeds,

such as pit bulls, from coverage, which creates a dilemma for the landlord or condominium association. Even when landlords allow pets, some may charge higher to cover additional wear and tear on the rental unit. All of these factors can give some tenants a reason to claim falsely that a pet is a support animal.



▪ **Requires documentation from a legitimate health care professional.** It is unfortunate that anyone can pay Internet-based companies to obtain certificates, “registration”, service and support dog vests along with letters from a doctor or social worker that claim that the customer is disabled and needs a support animal. The assessment is commonly based on a questionnaire or cursory discussion. Here are some actual examples of promotions:

“Instant Pre-Approval”

“Click the button to take the quiz and get pre-approved instantly.”

“Get approved by a board-certified medical doctor in 48 hours in your state.”

If a tenant’s disability is not “readily apparent”, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or depression, H 8215 would allow a landlord to require a tenant to provide documentation from a Rhode Island licensed health care provider with personal knowledge of the patient. The letter would state simply that the patient has a disability and that a support animal is medically necessary to help with the disability. The landlord would have no right to ask what the disability is. Once the tenant provides this documentation, the landlord, must make “reasonable accommodation to allow the animal or animals.

While requiring that the practitioner be licensed and based in Rhode Island may be too restrictive, the rest of this section is consistent with federal standards.

▪ **Defines support animals as dogs and cats:** Members of our association have dealt with tenants who have tried to claim that animals like snakes, parrots, and tarantulas are support animals. This legislation would define support animals as cats and dogs.

Conclusion

H 8215 would discourage tenants from falsely claiming that pets are support animals to avoid “no pets” policies without burdening tenants who have a disability.

For these reasons, RIAR respectfully supports H 8215 and urges passage. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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Rhode Island Association of REALTORS®