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From: bounce@bounce.voterveice.net on behalf of Jason Boulay <jboulay@rhodyliving.com>
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To: House Judiciary Committee
Subject: Support H7199 with amendments

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Dear Committee Clerk DiMezza,

Dear Members of the Rhode Island General Assembly,

I am writing regarding House Bill H7199, the "Rhode Island Survivor Early Lease Termination Act."

First, I want to make clear that I strongly support protecting victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and abuse. No tenant should ever feel trapped in unsafe housing due to fear of financial penalties or retaliation. The intent behind this legislation is important and compassionate.

However, I respectfully urge lawmakers to reconsider portions of the bill as currently drafted, specifically the self-certification provision and the broad liability placed on housing providers without sufficient safeguards against abuse of the process.

As written, the bill allows a tenant to terminate a legally binding lease agreement based solely on a self-certification form, without requiring independent documentation such as a police report, restraining order, or third-party verification. While I understand that not all victims are comfortable engaging law enforcement or the courts, this provision creates a significant risk of misuse by individuals simply seeking to break a lease without financial responsibility.

For many Rhode Island housing providers, especially small "mom-and-pop" landlords who own only a few units, an unexpected vacancy can create serious financial hardship. Mortgage payments, taxes, insurance, maintenance costs, and utilities continue regardless of occupancy. This bill effectively shifts the entire financial burden onto the property owner while offering little protection against fraudulent or bad-faith claims.

Additionally, the legislation imposes strict timelines and significant liability related to lock changes and tenant disputes. Landlords may find themselves forced into highly sensitive domestic situations without adequate legal clarity or protections. Many housing providers are not trained to investigate or adjudicate these matters and fear potential liability regardless of how they act.

I respectfully ask lawmakers to consider amendments that preserve protections for genuine victims while ensuring fairness and accountability for all parties involved. Potential revisions could include:

- * Requiring some form of third-party verification beyond self-certification;
- * Providing safe harbor protections for landlords acting in good faith;
- * Clarifying procedures involving co-tenants and lock changes;
- * Allowing reasonable notice periods to reduce sudden financial harm to property owners.

Protecting survivors and maintaining fair housing practices do not need to be mutually exclusive. I believe Rhode Island can craft legislation that supports victims while also preserving due process and preventing unintended abuse.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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