



RI Survivor Early Lease Termination Act

Unlocking Safety and Housing Stability for Rhode Island Survivors



Representative Karen Alzate • Senator Melissa Murray

What Does This Bill Do?

The RI Survivor Early Lease Termination Act provides essential housing protections for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking by:

- Allowing survivors to end a residential lease early without financial penalties when fleeing for safety
- Protecting survivors from disclosure of confidential information
- Providing multiple verification options, including restraining orders, advocate or counselor letters, or survivor self-certification, as already used in other Rhode Island laws
- Allowing survivors to request a lock change at their residence, at their own expense

Why This Bill Matters

Housing insecurity is one of the most significant barriers preventing survivors from escaping abuse. Survivors may need to leave their home urgently due to escalating violence, stalking, or threats to their children. Under current law, doing so can result in eviction, debt, or homelessness.

This bill creates a fair, safety-focused option that helps survivors leave dangerous situations without long-term housing consequences.

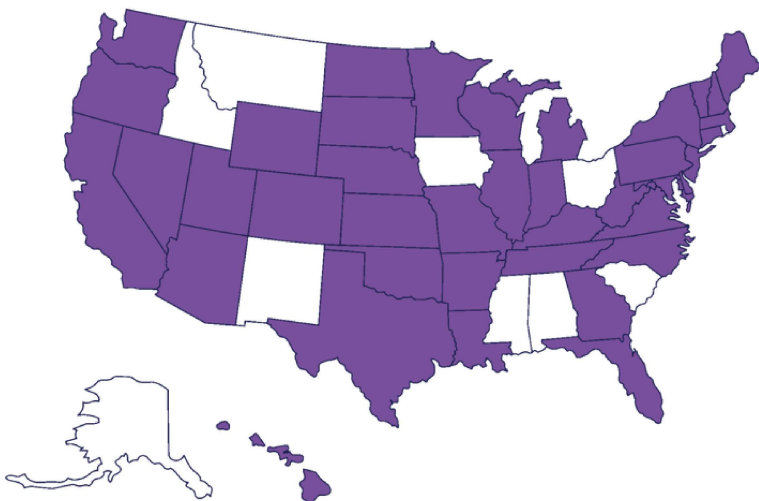
Alignment With Existing Law

- The legislation aligns Rhode Island law with protections already included in the federal Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which currently apply primarily to federally assisted housing.
- It extends these protections to all rental housing, regardless of funding source.
- Survivor self-certification is already recognized in Rhode Island through laws such as the Address Confidentiality Program and paid sick and safe leave.

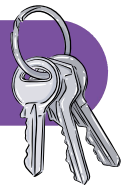


RI Is An Outlier

- 41 states already extend these fair housing protections to survivors in private housing.
- All other New England states, plus New York and New Jersey, have this protection
- 19 states already allow survivors to request lock changes



Mythbusting Survivor Early Lease Termination



MYTH: This bill is radical and would unfairly give tenants all the power.

FACT: This bill is a commonsense victim safety policy that is already the law in 41 other states. All of New England has this bill except Rhode Island. Passing this bill would add us to that list and protect both victims and landlords from potentially deadly violence occurring at the property.

MYTH: Allowing a survivor to self-certify would lead to many false petitions.

FACT: This has not been the case in the states where this law has functioned for many years. The official form will be created and hosted by the RI Secretary of State. These harmful assertions perpetuate a misogynistic bias that women who report abuse are lying and should not be believed. This is why these crimes are so severely underreported. We believe all survivors in our state. Survivors do not lightly take the step of disclosing domestic or sexual violence.

MYTH: This law will only create a headache for landlords losing their tenant(s).

FACT: We have heard from supportive RI landlords and housing advocates who understand the complex situations abuse victims are in who strongly support this bill. It is a reasonable, fair process when a tenant is in an often life-or-death situation. Prioritizing the safety of tenants and their families over the temporary inconvenience of losing a replaceable renter is logical and creates safer, more enticing environments for those who rent.

MYTH: Isn't a victim lock-change request in the bill a form of "self-help eviction?"

FACT: No. The legislation accounts for that on page 6. This section, based on the Massachusetts abuse victim lock-change law, requires a law enforcement, court-issued document, or protective order in the victim's favor against the co-tenant perpetrator.

In the event that both parties are named on the lease:

“(c) If the threat of abuse, domestic abuse, violence, sexual assault or stalking is posed by a person who is a tenant, co-tenant or household member, the lessor or owner may change the locks and deny a key to the alleged perpetrator upon receipt of a request to change the locks; provided, however, that such request shall be accompanied by: (1) A copy of a valid protective order issued against a tenant, co-tenant or household member”