



May 19, 2026

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

RE: RHODE ISLAND SURVIVOR EARLY LEASE TERMINATION ACT

Dear Chairman and Committee Members:

On behalf of the Rhode Island Association of REALTORS® (RIAR), we respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to H7199. RIAR represents more than 5,900 licensed real estate professionals who work every day in the listing, sale, leasing, management, and appraisal of residential and commercial real estate and who are committed to fair housing practices, consumer protection, and stable housing markets, to make Rhode Island a better place to call home.

RIAR recognizes the importance of ensuring survivors of domestic violence and related crimes have access to safe housing. However, H7199 poses significant legal and operational concerns for landlords and could have unintended consequences in Rhode Island's rental housing market.

Overview of the Proposed Legislation

H7199 would amend the Residential Landlord and Tenant Act to allow tenants who are victims of abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking to terminate a lease early and request safety protections. Aimed at enhancing survivor protections, several sections create challenges and uncertainty for landlords.

Inconsistent Definitions of "Household Member"

H7199 currently contains two different definitions of "household member".

- The general definition includes a broad group such as former partners, relatives, or individuals who lived together in the past three years.
- The lock-change section uses a narrower definition limited to authorized occupants currently residing in the unit.

Because these provisions rely on different definitions, it creates uncertainty regarding who qualifies for early lease termination or requesting a lock change. This ambiguity leaves landlords unclear about their legal obligations and increases the risk of conflicting interpretations and enforcement.

Loophole in Verification Standards

H7199 permits several forms of verification documents that a tenant or household member is a victim.

- Protective orders
- Law enforcement reports
- Document from attorneys, healthcare providers, or victim advocates
- Self-certification by the tenant

While multiple verification options may improve accessibility for survivors, permitting self-certification raises significant compliance concerns. Landlords would be required to make decisions affecting lease termination based solely on a tenant's written statement, increasing the risk of misuse.

Unclear Impact on Co-Tenant Liability

H7199 offers limited clarity on how early lease termination would affect other tenants. This raises questions about:

- Whether termination applies to all tenants or only the survivor
- Whether remaining tenants remain responsible for rent
- How landlords should handle shared leases when one tenant leaves for safety reasons

Without clear statutory direction, this could lead to disputes among tenants and landlords and introduce confusion regarding ongoing lease responsibilities.

Loss of Rent Due to Unreasonable Notice Provisions

H7199 permits early termination and limits liability for future rent once termination occurs. However, it does not establish a defined transition or notice period. As drafted, a lease could terminate immediately upon notice and documentation, creating sudden vacancies and disrupting rental income. If a tenant were to give notice on May 7th, the landlord would be deprived of rental income for the rest of the month.

Lack of Guidance for Mutual Protection Orders

H7199 provides no guidance for situations in which both tenants have protective orders against each other. Landlords may be placed in the difficult position of determining which tenant should retain access to the unit. Landlords may face increased liability risk when attempting to comply with the statute.

Conclusion

RIAR recognizes the importance of protecting survivors of domestic violence and other forms of abuse and supports policies that help victims access safe housing. However, H7199 raises significant legal and operational concerns related to inconsistent definitions, verification standards, co-tenant liability, and the practical implementation of the law.

For these reasons, the Rhode Island Association of REALTORS® respectfully opposes H7199.

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
Director, Government Affairs
Rhode Island Association of REALTORS®